No. 17 CRITERION SERIES 50 Cents

220
L.C.

Mrs. Bob

A NOVEL

BY

THE AUTHOR OF DR. JACK

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COPYRIGHT OCT 21 1896 CITY OF WASHINGTON

NEW YORK
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS
232 TO 238 WILLIAM STREET

MORE OF BERTHA M. CLAY'S NOVELS ARE SOLD THAN OF ANY OTHER AUTHOR.

Bertha M. Clay's Novels

The majority of these novels are copyrighted and can be had only in the Clover Series. Paper, 25 cents.

For a Woman's Honor (new).
A Heart's Bitterness.
A Heart's Idol.
The Gipsy's Daughter.
In Love's Crucible.
Marjorie Deane.
Gladys Greye.
Another Woman's Husband.
Fair, but Faithless
Another Man's Wife.
Violet Lisle.
Between Two Hearts.
'Twixt Love and Hate.
Beyond Pardon
A Woman's Temptation.
Put Asunder.
Between Two Loves.
Under a Shadow.
The Earl's Atonement.
Repented at Leisure.
Weaker than a Woman.
Dora Thorne.
An Ideal Love (new).
A Golden Heart.
A Mad Love.
The Duke's Secret.
Lord Lisle's Daughter.
Wife in Name Only.
A Fiery Ordeal.
The Shadow of a Sin.
A Woman's War.
Claribel s Love Story.
A Broken Wedding Ring.
From Out the Gloom.
Thorns and Orange Blossoms.
Thrown On the World.
Lord Lynne's Choice.
Lady Hutton's Ward.
Sunshine and Roses.
Her Martyrdom.
The Belle of Lynn.
Prince Charlie's Daughter.
Which Loved Him Best?
A True Magdalen.

For sale by all booksellers and newsdealers, or sent postage free on receipt of price, by the publishers.

STREET & SMITH, NEW YORK.

MRS. BOB.

By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

POPULAR NOVELS

IN THE

CRITERION SERIES.

No. 1. MR. LAKE OF CHICAGO.	50 cents.
No. 2. DR. JACK.	50 cents.
No. 3. DR. JACK'S WIFE.	50 cents.
No. 4. MISS PAULINE OF NEW YORK.	50 cents.
No. 5. CAPTAIN TOM.	50 cents.
No. 6. MISS CAPRICE.	50 cents.
No. 7. BARON SAM.	50 cents.
No. 8. MONSIEUR BOB (new edition).	50 cents.
No 9. THE COLONEL BY BREVET (new edition).	50 cents.
No. 10. MAJOR MATTERSON OF KENTUCKY (new edition).	50 cents.
No. 11. A GENTLEMAN FROM GASCONY.	50 cents.
No. 12. A DAUGHTER OF DELILAH.	50 cents.
No. 13. THE NABOB OF SINGAPORE.	50 cents.
No. 14. THE BACHELOR OF THE MIDWAY.	50 cents.
No. 15. NONE BUT THE BRAVE.	50 cents.
No. 16. MRS. BOB.	50 cents.

FOR SALE EVERYWHERE.

MRS. BOB

A NOVEL

BY

ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

AUTHOR OF DR. JACK, ETC.

4°

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT.
OCT 21 1896
CITY OF WASHINGTON.

57884-B?-1

NEW YORK
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS
29 ROSE STREET

COPYRIGHTED,
1896,
By STREET & SMITH.

CONTENTS.

BOOK ONE.

A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
I.	—The Old Story Reversed	7
II.	—"I Wonder If You Are That Man."	17
III.	—Hawk's Nest	27
IV.	—The Virginian Hoodwinked	36
V.	—The Girl Who Dared	44
VI.	—Told Under the Moon	54
VII.	—Bob Pemberton in the Wrong Room	62
VIII.	—On the Road to Denver	72

BOOK TWO.

IN THE WHIRL AT DENVER.

IX.	—The Man Who Wore the White Primrose	78
X.	—Monsieur Merle, the Wizard	88
XI.	—What the Doctor Knew	97
XII.	—Now It is Bob, the Magician	105
XIII.	—Senator John's Secret	114
XIV.	—Enter Mrs. Bob	121
XV.	—The Flight of the East-bound Express	128
XVI.	—Joe Hooker in the Arena	136

BOOK THREE.

FOLLOWING DESTINY TO NEW YORK.

XVII.	—Advice—At One Dollar a Minute	144
XVIII.	—A Fight With Fortune	152
XIX.	—The Walking was Good	170
XX.	—Stopped on the Virginia Mountains	176
XXI.	—The Ghost Walks at Gordon Manor	183
XXII.	—The Face at the Window	191
XXIII.	—Heard at the Fifth Avenue	199
XXIV.	—Adventures of One Night	207

BOOK FOUR.

THE WIDOW OF THE ALHAMBRA FLATS.

XXV.	—The Mysterious Tenant of the Alhambra Flats	215
XXVI.	—Bob Finds a Father-in-law	223
XXVII.	—Looking Backward	229
XXVIII.	—Craig Has It All Arranged	236
XXIX.	—So Has That Schemer, Monsieur Merle	242
XXX.	—It is an Open Question—Which Will Win?	248
XXXI.	—Now Monsieur Smiles—But——	256
XXXII.	—He Laughs Loudest Who Laughs Last	263

MRS. BOB.

BOOK ONE.

A Lodge in the Wilderness.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD STORY REVERSED.

"That settles it—I'm lost!"

The speaker sits down upon the stump of a fallen tree and proceeds to light a cigar. His manner does not betray any great emotion—perhaps he fails to fully comprehend just what it means to be lost in these wild western woods, or it may be he never allows himself to get excited over anything, for a man who has spent several years in the stock exchange of Wall street, with some hundreds of fellow men apparently insane for the time being around him, can afford to look with contempt upon the small things of life, that arise to bewilder one.

"Let me see," he says, calmly, puffing away in a thoughtful manner. "Senator John and I quarreled over the road—each was determined, so we temporarily separated. I wonder where he finds himself just now. Good joke on me—I passed this very stump an

hour ago—even then I thought it had a familiar look and marked it. When I saw that paper fluttering in the breeze I felt like shouting at sight of an old friend. Lost—you couldn't lose me in this place—give me an hour and I'll bring up at this spot every time. The great question with me is how shall I leave the woods?"

The man has laid his gun against a tree some ten feet away—his action declares that he can hardly be an old campaigner in this section.

His appearance stamps him an amateur sportsman—all his accoutrements are new and stiff, and while they give him the look of a mighty Nimrod, it would only require some old native with a government musket to distance him out of sight in a match.

Under the canvas helmet which he wears can be seen a face which, if not handsome, is at least resolute and good natured.

No one ever found Bob Pemberton anything but genial—he can crack jokes at any fireside, and seems to get more humor out of the square inch than most people.

Now and then, while he sits here, he chuckles.

"Wonder what John is doing at this blessed moment—I can imagine him floundering about up to his arm pits in a swamp, or, horrors! what if he were right, after all, and while I am wandering in this dismal wilderness, with night coming on, he is enjoying the society of Miss Gordon, at her forest lodge. What a queer notion, to have a lodge in the wilderness—and yet I've an idea we'll find her a remarkable young woman.

"I've been indulging in a dream, you know—what if, in wandering about here, I suddenly hear a scream —a cry of distress, and in a woman's voice? You bet Bob Pemberton flies to the rescue like a chevalier of old, on wings of swiftness—bursts into a glade, and discovers the fair maiden on her knees, facing a deadly rattlesnake, or perhaps a crouching tiger. Of course I raise my gun—where is it?—oh, yes, calmly reposing against yonder tree—I'm the crack shot of the Seventh Regiment when I'm at home, and it's a mere bagatelle for me to send a bullet where it will do the most good, and rescue the lovely maiden. That makes me a hero, you see—never played such a role before—wonder what it feels like? When I've finished this weed I'll trot along and see if I can't make headway. The prospect of spending the night here isn't very pleasant, I declare."

Bob Pemberton stretches himself, holding his cigar in one hand.

"Great Scott!" he exclaims, for the action brings out a deep, ominous growl.

He immediately twists his head around to discover the cause of it, and finds no trouble in doing this. Not twelve feet away from him is the trunk of the fallen tree, and flattened out upon it he sees what appears to be a tremendous Maltese cat—the square head and wicked appearance of the animal tell Bob plainly enough that he need not go far to discover his first panther, since the beast has found him out, and is, apparently, ready to cover the distance between them.

The spectacle is not a pleasant one, and poor Bob

finds himself in a predicament, with his gun so far away from his hand. Every time he makes a move as if to secure it he is greeted with a growl, just as if the gray tiger-cat were warning him against the act.

"Good Heaven! I guess I'm done for this time sure. Come all the way from New York—escaped the pit-falls set by the bears in Wall street, to be made a meal of by a miserable cat. Seems to me I ought to have a knife on my person"—a search, a groan—"hang the luck! I loaned it to that wretch, Senator John, when we cooked dinner. That settles me. How the demon glares at me. I've heard of the power of the human eye—here's a chance to try it. Now for it!"

It is a battle royal for a minute—Bob stares as though a kingdom were at stake—well, all he possesses in the world is.

"I'm afraid it's no go—the beast looks as though he would spring at any minute. I must make a desperate effort to reach my gun. Confusion! I don't believe I charged it again after bowling over the rabbit that made our dinner. Unlucky fates—what shall I do—light up another cigar?"

This he actually proceeds to do, each movement being greeted with that ominous growl, for the savage beast, possibly, construes his action as one of defiance.

He has just tossed his match aside when the idea strikes him that if he could start a fire among the dead leaves he might scare the dreadful monster away, for all animals fear fire as Satan is supposed to regard holy water.

Thinking thus, and mentally congratulating him-

self over the bright idea, he begins to brush the dead leaves in a heap with his feet. Perhaps the rustling sound further enrages the panther—at any rate, he no longer clings closely to the trunk of the fallen forest monarch, but rises in the air, describing a beautiful parabola in his passage toward Bob Pemberton.

That worthy utters an ejaculation of alarm, and falls on his face to avoid the rush of the flying monster.

It is then that he hears a sharp crack; with a heavy thud the panther comes to the earth, and Bob, scrambling to his feet, sees, to his amazement and delight, that the gray brute is kicking his last, five feet away.

He looks around—some frontier hunter has certainly done him good service, and Bob stands ready to overwhelm him with thanks. To his surprise, he sees no such party hastening forward to claim his due—and what small change Bob may possess. Still, that bullet certainly came from somewhere—he even eyes his own gun, resting innocently against the tree, and shakes his head negatively.

"I say, old fellow, show yourself—that was a pretty fair shot—nothing to be ashamed of, anyhow. Here's one anxious to shake hands with you—show up, that's a good chap," he calls, aloud, surveying the gloomy woods around, as though they might be peopled with hobgoblins.

Without warning the silence is suddenly broken by a silvery laugh, that causes the blood to rush like hot lava into Bob's face.

"Jove! a girl's laugh, by all the powers. Knight of chivalry, eh—going around rescuing maidens with that wonderful gun of yours? Seems to me things are slightly mixed—er—that the boot is on the other leg. Where the deuce is she?"

"Ha, ha! old fellow, not a shot to be ashamed of, eh? Well, you see I hated to shoot the poor brute sitting, and waited until he sprang. Like a true sportsman, I paused after firing to reload, but here I am and ready to receive your fervid expressions of gratitude."

Bob Pemberton stares.

He might easily be pardoned for so doing, as the speaker steps into view and advances, for surely since the days of Diana no such sight has been seen in forest or glade.

The girl is small in stature, finely built, and as handsome as a picture, with eyes black as sloes. She is dressed in sable velvet, and wears leather leggins, while in her hands lies the small rifle which was used so effectively in Bob's behalf.

The latter recovers himself—a man who has lived thirty years in New York and spent ten of it in the swirl of the money market, is not one to be easily abashed.

"Pardon me, miss, but, naturally, I am surprised to see one of your sex in this wild region. All the same, I'm delighted to owe my life to you. Consider me under bond to repay the debt at the first opportunity —yours to command, Bob Pemberton. Pardon, again, but are you a chief's daughter? You see I'm a stranger in these parts, a greenhorn, and I like to

know my ground. You will excuse this question, I hope?"

She looks at him fixedly, as though in doubt with regard to his sanity, and then laughs again.

"Why, he actually takes me for an Indian maiden —a second Hiawatha, a Pocohontas! Poor man, you evidently are out of your beaten track—you need a guardian."

"Suppose you assume the role, seeing you have begun so well," says the unabashed Bob.

"Thank you, I was after game—and I found it."

"Perhaps of a different variety from what you expected," he remarks, rather dryly, which evokes another burst of merriment.

Poor Bob feels rather humiliated—his castles in Spain have tumbled ingloriously down. Instead of rescuing some maiden in distress, he has himself been saved from peril by the accuracy of this remarkable girl's aim.

Such a light-hearted pilgrim never remains long cast down, and he begins to appreciate the whole affair as a great joke on himself, so that by the time his strange companion laughs again at some ridiculous remark he makes, he is ready to join in her merriment.

"Perhaps you are an angel sent, not only to deliver me from the claws of a tiger-cat, but to lead me out of the wilderness, for I humbly confess I'm lost," he says.

"You don't belong in these parts, I see."

"I'm from that great and wicked city, New York."

"Poor man—then you are indeed far out of your

bearings—there is not a house within miles of this spot."

"But you—must live somewhere?"

"I have wandered farther away from home than usual. Do you think you could walk?"

She has a poor opinion of his staying qualities—she never saw him spend five hours in the crowded Exchange, pushing, crushing, shouting like a maniac—a man who could go through that experience get tired over such a small jaunt as this—bah! he is as fresh as ever.

"I could walk to Paradise in your company," he declares, audaciously.

"You may yet have the opportunity," she replies, very soberly. "One thing is sure, we must leave this place immediately."

"Yes, night is settling down fast. I trust you know the way, miss, for we have no moon."

"Still, we may have all the light needed," she remarks, in a mysterious way.

"I'm ready, if you are," throwing his rifle over his shoulder and all the while wondering at the strange words she uses, which are an enigma to him.

"Then come, and we will test your powers of endurance."

He starts off briskly at her side, and there is a swing to his stride that pleases the girl. Bob's latent feelings have been aroused—it is bad enough for him to owe his life to a girl, but he is bound that he shall not merit her contempt.

Thus they push through the woods, the girl lead-

ing in a manner that proves her knowledge of the forest.

Darkness falls fast now, under the shelter of the trees, and the dead leaves rustle in the rising wind, for the early frosts have long since nipped the forest foliage.

As they advance along their way, Bob notices that his companion acts uneasily—several times she stops, and he begins to imagine she, too, has lost her way, until he notices that she seems to listen on each occasion.

It is not Bob's nature to remain long quiet—he is too accustomed to the racket and roar of human voices not to make some noise himself on occasion, and presently he seeks to draw the young girl into conversation.

His first venture is hardly a success, for, after answering his question, she lapses into silence again.

"Have you ever heard the ocean beating upon the shore?" he persists.

"Never," she replies, once more coming to a halt, and apparently puzzling over the direction they should take. "What makes you ask such a strange question?"

"Well, you see, the wind is rising fast, and makes such a noise ahead of us that it reminded me of the breakers. And I declare, we're going to have some moonlight, after all—I had an idea that it didn't rise until much later."

The girl turns upon him with something like contempt in her manner.

"What you hear is, in truth, the wind, and it is

driving a sea before it—a sea that, I am afraid, threatens to ingulf us—a sea that will roar and crackle over this spot on which we are now standing inside of twenty minutes!"

Bob is startled by her impressive manner.

"What under Heaven do you mean?" he asks, not a glimmer of the truth as yet appearing to him.

"Simply this—the forest is on fire and a tornado of flames threatens to cut off our escape!" is her steady response.

CHAPTER II.

"I WONDER IF YOU ARE THAT MAN."

He no longer gropes in the dark, for her words, though spoken so quietly, have let a flood of light in upon his mind. Though he has never seen a forest fire, he can comprehend what it means, from descriptions read at various times.

"Now that you speak of it, I can detect a strong odor of burning pine in the air."

"Smart—go up ahead—so many were able to discover America after Columbus did—such an easy matter, just sailing to the west. But our danger is real—if we make a mistake and go the wrong way we shall be burned to a crisp."

"That's pleasant," he remarks, with a shrug.

"You do not seem alarmed."

"Well, I may be green in the ways of the woods, but I believe I have never been called a coward. I have heard much of the horror attending one of these conflagrations, so it is not ignorance that prompts my actions. I am quite willing to do anything you think best."

"Well, I like that. It shows you have some sense in your head, Bob Pemberton, as I believe you called yourself. You are quite right—we have no time to lose if we would escape with our lives. I have tried to locate the fire so that we might reach its farther

limit, and I believe our course is this way. Come!"

Now that the danger is apparent, and Bob knows what he has to face, he shows considerable energy. They increase their pace to a run whenever the nature of the woods will permit.

The darkness has had little chance to settle down before it is dispelled by the rapidly increasing glow of the fire. Even the heavens show the reflection—low clouds erstwhile so fleecy becoming an angry hue, while a pillar of black smoke ascends at several points where the fire rages most furiously.

Still they press on.

Bob notices that his companion begins to lag—she has tramped far and wide during the day, and was already wearied when she met him. Her spirit is willing, but overtaxed nature rebels.

Meanwhile the air has grown insufferably hot, while the smoke inflames their eyes. Cinders, blown in advance by the strong wind, shower around them, and in more than one place an incipient conflagration is started where the dead leaves are banked up against old logs.

The roaring sound has also increased, until it has become horribly suggestive of the high carnival being held among the forest trees by the king of fire-demons. To be heard now one must raise the voice to a shout.

It is a scene that Bob Pemberton will never forget, providing he is fortunate enough to live through the experience; openings in the woods to the left allow a glimpse to be had of the fiery spectacle, and it is certainly awe-inspiring.

They are advancing in the right direction, but it is a question whether they will be able to get far enough to distance the broad line marked by the billows of flame that leap from tree to tree, and reduce the once proud forest to a miserable ruin, with skeleton stumps smoking and smoldering in its track.

The man has meekly followed up to this time, but now he steps into the lead. He notices, with deep concern, that the girl no longer runs with the swiftness of a fawn—she is tired. As she looks up at him she tries to smile cheerily while saying, in little gasps:

"Don't you think that we are making it—that our chances of escape are good?"

Now, Bob, aroused to the occasion, can easily see that the line of fire stretches some distance beyond, and advances rapidly—he also knows that even by changing their course so as to flee more directly from it, they will not be able to escape if their progress does not increase.

"I fear that you deceive yourself—that you are also utterly worn out—you must let me help you."

He takes hold of her arm without as much as "by your leave," and thus assists her. For a short time a visible difference in their progress is the result, but the girl suddenly comes to a halt and looks at him fixedly.

"It is no use," she says, as loud as her spent breath will allow, "I can go no farther."

"But you must," he declares, casting a look over his shoulder at the advancing line of roaring fire that already burns his face.

"It is impossible—I could not run—you must save yourself, Bob Pemberton."

"And leave you here to burn—may I be flayed alive if I do! We are companions in trouble, and, sink or swim, we go together. Are you sure you can't walk?"

"Not another step."

"Then there is only one thing to be done," he says, resolutely.

With a fling, he sends his gun from him.

"What would you do?" she cries.

"Carry you," he replies.

"You are mad—there is yet a chance to save yourself—run while it lasts!"

"Never! Say no more—I believe I can save both our lives—you shall see how strong I am."

Almost before she knows it, the girl is snatched up in his powerful arms.

"Clasp my neck—it makes my task easier."

She obeys like a little child—in this dreadful time, with death in a terrible shape so near them, these two—strangers an hour since—seem drawn together by some mysterious bond.

Fate has welded the chains that clasp them.

So Bob Pemberton rushes forward—he is like a madman, and endowed with strength that is almost superhuman. Not only his own life is in peril, but that of another, and he feels that the chance has come to redeem his reputation—to carry out the work of chivalry.

The avalanche roaring down the side of Mont

Blanc could not create a greater furor than does this whirlwind of fire on their left.

Bob pays strict attention to business—he knows that if Heaven is kind and allows them to live through this fearful night, it must be on account of the heroic efforts he puts forth—that his strength is the only barrier that lies between them and destruction.

More than once he stumbles, but recovers immediately—on, he rushes, as though the weight in his arms were almost nothing.

Doubtless the girl who surveyed him with such disdain after saving his life has reason to alter her opinion now—it is at least an experience she will never forget, even though others still more singular fall to their common lot in days to come.

Fortune favors the brave. When it looks as though the end is near, and they are about to be overwhelmed by the flood of flame, now reaching its high tide, Bob gives vent to what is meant for a shout of exultation, but as the poor fellow is fairly gasping for breath, on account of his tremendous exertion, it is hardly more than a gurgle.

As her head is so close to his curly one, she catches the expression of his cry and knows he has some reason for rejoicing.

He tries to increase his speed—it is the last lap on the race course—the stake is human life, and, they are on the homestretch—close at their side pursues death on a white horse.

This remarkable and gallant spurt on his part is all that saves them—his strength holds out until they

issue from the forest and reach a great clearing, around which the fire does not seem to be pushing.

Poor Bob staggers out upon this as far as he can —his shaking knees almost knock together from weakness.

"Let me down—I can walk now, Bob Pemberton. You are nearly dying!" cries the girl, struggling to release herself from his frenzied grasp.

He opens his arms, and she alights on her feet like a young deer. Bob is pretty nearly gone, but the spirit within him is far from succumbing—he endeavors to walk on, finds his limbs palsied, as it were, from the severe strain put upon them—sinks on his knees.

"You have killed yourself—for me!" cries the girl, in great distress.

Even the roaring flames, the trees falling as though they were pipe-stems, the avalanche of fire advancing near by, seem to hold no terror while this new source of alarm appears before her.

"I am worn out—that is all. I will lie down here —the heat may not be so great. But you must continue across the savannah!" he shouts, his voice still holding good.

"And leave you—never! Even here the heat will sear your brain—you must get farther away, even if you roll or crawl."

Her words, her anxiety, give him new hope, and new energy. He even bends his powerful will toward increasing the distance between the fire and themselves.

It is a supreme effort, and only comes from the thought that she means to share his danger. He would

be unable to walk only for the assistance she gives, putting an arm around him. In this moment of peril, when life and death hang in the balance, all prudish thoughts are put aside—he risked everything for her—why should she hesitate to do what little is now possible for him?

Thus they move along, foot by foot—each yard passed over takes them farther from the fierce heat of the burning forest, and their parched faces begin to catch the first breath of cool air coming from a new quarter.

How bracing it is, how refreshing. Even Bob, utterly worn out as he is, seems to drink in a new lease of life with each draught, and is able to continue his shambling with more vigor.

"That change of wind saved us," he says, aloud, for the din of the great conflagration still makes conversation a difficulty.

"I have my own ideas about that," she replies, with meaning in her voice.

"We are far enough away—let us rest here a short time. Then, perhaps, I shall be able to walk. Oh, I surely will be."

"See, yonder, is a brook—what relief its waters will be to our parched throats. A little farther, Bob Pemberton, and we will halt."

He advances with new energy, and takes out a little folding drinking cup from his pocket.

Bending over the gurgling stream he finds the water cool and clear—evidently it comes from a place where the fire has not raged.

Another moment and he is offering her the cup in his trembling hand.

"You first," she says.

"No, no, I am a gentleman," he replies, resolutely.

Then she accepts the grateful draught, and soon fills the cup for him.

Fate did a very queer thing when it brought these two together under such peculiar conditions.

By degrees Bob's strength comes back to him, though he will on the following day feel his exertions severely.

They sit there and watch the wonderful spectacle of a blazing forest, that stretches for a mile, at least, to the north.

It is rendered all the more realistic to them because they have so recently escaped from the angry abyss of flames, and a feeling of deep thankfulness rests upon each heart as they reflect upon what might have been.

"I feel recuperated, and it would be well for us to be moving since there can be no telling when the wind may shift again, and the fire surround us."

Bob is a good general, and has more than once led the bull forces of the stock exchange in a raid upon the bears. He can see ahead and anticipate many coming possibilities.

So, arm-in-arm for support, they walk on.

The girl assumes the leadership, and from her manner it is evident that she knows just where they are and whither they are heading.

As they leave the burning forest farther in the rear the darkness increases; but having come upon what

appears to be a valley road, they follow along it and have little trouble.

"Do you know you haven't told me your name yet?" remarks Bob, at length, after they have spoken about various subjects.

She laughs at this—a merry, ringing laugh, the first she has given utterance to since the terrible danger bore down upon them.

"Was I guilty of such a gross breach of etiquette? Really, you must forgive me. To my friends I am known simply as Gypsy."

"A singular name, and yet quite appropriate, I must confess. Do you live in this heathen wilderness, may I ask?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then, perhaps, you can direct me. I have found no one in the day's journey who could give me even a pointer. My companion and myself disagreed at a point where the road forked, and concluded to separate. I am inclined to believe he was right, after all, since I got into a muddle; but don't think that I regret it, since it was the cause of making me acquainted with one whom I might otherwise never have met."

"That was well put, Mr. Bob Pemberton. Now, if you'll be so kind as to tell me what brings a gentleman to this wild region from a point so far away as New York, perhaps I may be able to direct you."

"I'm looking for a place called Hawk's Nest."

"Oh!" with a start.

"The property—the hunting lodge, or some such

place, of an eccentric lady known as Miss Estelle Gordon."

"Why, that must be auntie!"

"Eh? Do you mean to say you live at the place known as Hawk's Nest?"

"Certainly—I am a niece of Miss Estelle Gordon, and you have come all the way from New York——"

"To see the lady—yes. What a singular fate, what a blessed fate, let me add, that threw me in the way of her niece."

"All the way from New York," the girl repeats. "I wonder if you are that man."

CHAPTER III.

HAWK'S NEST.

The singular being who has called herself Gypsy Gordon apparently desires to confine the conversation to a sphere of her own selection, for she at once makes mention of the fire and what a great fright her aunt will be in. Bob remembers those peculiar words and finds time, later on, to ponder over them.

"How far away would you think the house is?" he asks, as he laboriously trudges along.

"I am sorry to say nearly a mile. How would it do for you to rest here while I go on—then help could be sent back for you?"

"But you—you would have to go alone in the intense darkness."

"Ah! you forget. Gypsy Gordon is well able to take care of herself," cheerily.

"So I did—pardon me. But, unless my ears deceive me, I hear a singular noise ahead, a pounding that makes me fear the fire may have whipped around and headed us off."

She listens, and utters a cry, but it is of joy.

"They are coming!"

"Who is that?" demands Bob.

"Some of those from Hawk's Nest—mounted on horses, too. See, you can catch a glimpse of the lanterns through the trees. They look like giant fireflies rushing along."

Bob sees them, but his thoughts are more pratical, and he rejoices at the idea of assistance being near at hand The group of riders carrying the will-o'-the-wisp lights dash around a bend in the valley road. In another moment they threaten to ride over the two, when the girl, seizing a hunting horn she carries at her side, gives a silvery blast that rings out sharp and clear on the night air.

Immediately there is a drawing in of horses in hot haste.

"Gypsy, is it you?" calls a woman's voice, shrill with apparent tense excitement.

"Yes, auntie, safe and sound."

"Thank Heaven! Child, we feared the worst when Ichabod came in reporting a terrible fire to the north, and darkness drew on without a sign of you. I could restrain my anxiety no longer, but, ordering out all the horses in the stable, mounted our guests and servants and made up this search and relief party."

"I must be a second Sir John Franklin, then, only, instead of being lost in the ice, it is fire this time. I trust you have two spare horses, auntie."

"Two—why, you have a companion—a man."

"Yes, a gentleman who saved my life—but for him I should even now be in that blazing forest."

"I beg pardon," begins Bob, when some one cries:

"Bless my stars, it's Bob."

"Ah! are you there, Senator John? I give in before you say a word—you win the wager, but don't believe I envy you. Fate had other things in store for me."

"He is almost dead from fatigue—he actually ran

a mile through that blazing woods, carrying me—just fancy. Some one give him a horse."

A servant leaps to the ground.

"He is welcome to my mount, Miss Gypsy," says a smooth voice, a polished, even voice that marks the possessor a man of education and refinement—something in it would readily betray to a shrewd observer that the speaker is a Southern man—a Virginian.

But Pemberton starts at the sound and looks keenly up at the speaker.

"Ah! Mr. Guy Livingstone here. This is an unexpected pleasure—I anticipated seeing you in time, but did not dream you would outstrip me in the race."

"My dear fellow," says the other, with a light laugh, as he flips the ashes from his cigar with his little finger, "remember the old saying, 'the race is not always to the swift.' "

"Begar! hear ze words of wisdom—I am positif zat it sall be so wif us. Mr. Bob, I salute you!"

"Monsieur Merle here, too," mutters the man from New York, as though staggered.

The light of the several lanterns reveals the four persons who serve to form such a strange company, and this is what Bob sees as he glances from one to another:

There is Miss Gordon, a prim spinster, with a severe face and strait-laced person, whose countenance, however, may not be an index to her hidden heart.

Then comes Senator John, the oddest, best-natured crank of a pilgrim who ever trotted around the globe

seeking new sights—as man who smokes a Persian *chiboque* when at home, wears a Turkish fez, who has a memento of every people under the sun, and who believes in Bob Pemberton through thick and thin, as a boy after his own heart.

Then comes Guy Livingstone—handsome, graceful, polished—a cool customer, an unscrupulous enemy, and a man to be handled at all times with gloves.

Last, but not least Monsieur Merle, the Franco-American man of law, a dried up specimen who might pass for an Egyptian mummy in the hands of a Barnum, and yet who poses as a Beau Brummel, strange to say, wearing the most amazing cravats, his hobby, and a man who never knows in the bright lexicon of legal phraseology such a word as fail—who has sought Miss Gordon far and wide—*for a purpose.*

A singular collection, truly, when Bob's own angular figure, and the velvet-clad form of the vivacious gypsy are added.

By this time Pemberton is mounted—at least, thank Heaven he is a horseman, owing to his Kentucky birth.

Gypsy bounds upon the back of a sable steed with the ease of an independent soul—the horse whinnies a welcome, showing that it must be her own property.

"We are ready, gentlemen—let us head for Hawk's Nest," she exclaims.

Riding by the side of Senator John, she leans over and says:

"You would do well to keep alongside your friend

—he has undergone a terrible strain and may faint in the saddle, which I must say he sits well."

"Oh! Bob's from Old Kaintuck—but what you say is well put—I'll keep close by him—he's too good a fellow to neglect, miss."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," is all she replies, but during the ride back to the lodge in the forest Senator John notices that Gypsy guards Bob on the left even as he does on the right.

Little is said on the way, but considerable thinking is doubtless done, for the elements brought together in this hour of danger constitute what promises to be one of the most peculiar dramas ever played in real life—a drama where the forces of human intrigue are arrayed against each other for the possession of a prize. Now lights are seen ahead.

"We are there!" exclaims the singular girl for the benefit of the one she fears must be sorely tried.

They draw rein.

The so-called forest lodge appears to be quite an extensive array of buildings; being perched upon a rock, it has received the name by which it is known through the country round about.

A hawk's nest inhabited by two doves—strange anomaly indeed.

Here are lights and comfort—behind lies the dark forest, and far away the glow of the receding conflagration.

They dismount and servants take the horses away to the stables. Bob Pemberton wearied as he is looks around in wonder at the astonishing sight. Everything is perfection—an abundance of money and the

taste of a woman back of it have built up an Eden here in the wilderness.

Entering the house they find themselves just in time for dinner; in a large room, the walls of which are adorned with pieces of ancient armor, relics of the chase, and paintings, a long table is set.

"Bring your friend and come," says Gypsy to Bob, and he feels that they are under the girl's protecting care.

He has looked at the aunt several times in a puzzled way as though there are some things he cannot comprehend; but when thus addressed, he slips his arm though that of Senator John and willingly follows such a fair guide.

"Make yourselves as comfortable as you can in here, and come to the table as soon as you are ready. Remember, you are welcome at Hawk's Nest."

So saying, she leaves them.

Bob turns upon the other eagerly.

"What can you make of her, John—she is an enigma to me, young, charming, yet a child in many of her ways. Her aunt must have brought her up away from the world—she certainly does not know a great deal of its conventionalities. As to Miss Estelle, she makes me feel anxious about the success of our expedition."

"Great Jupiter!" exclaims the other, "is it possible the man doesn't know?"

"What?"

"You talk as if the aunt were the party with whom our mission deals."

"Is there anything odd about that?"

"Why, she's only a supernumerary about here, a surplus piece of furniture, as it were, useful for certain purposes, but not a matter of great importance—a sort of chaperon, as it were."

"Then the real Miss Gordon, the wonderful creature who is back of this paradise in the forest with whom we are to deal—have you seen here?"

"Well, hear the innocent question! You have had the lady to yourself two hours or more, saved her life, and no doubt won her everlasting gratitude."

Bob springs almost out of his chair.

"John Archer, do you mean to tell me that will-o'-the-wisp, that Diana of the forest, that remarkable girl with whom I fought for life against the flames, is Estelle Gordon, the person whom we have come thousands of miles to meet?"

"I do," solemnly replies the diplomat.

"How do you know it?" suspiciously.

"By a dozen different signs. To begin with, her aunt told me so—then Livingstone has spoken of her—you know why he is here."

"I can guess it, John, and the other, too."

"You mean Monsieur Merle—well, he's a lawyer and scents a big fat fee ahead—he has the faculty of discovering such things, even as a buzzard can detect the presence of carrion. I tell you, my dear Bob, we've got a tremendous job before us, but, thank goodness, your adventure gives us the inside track."

"Oh, you think so, eh? Well, let's get ready to go to the table. I confess I'm famished, and a good meal will do wonders toward restoring me. We'll talk over this singular matter at our leisure."

Following Bob's advice, they soon move in the direction of the dining-hall, where the others have preceded them.

The conversation is general, and of course the forest fire comes in for a share of it, but neither of the actors in that little drama volunteer to describe their adventure. Bob can see the Virginian looking at him with a peculiar gleam in his eye, and, secretly, the man from New York chuckles at the thought that circumstances have allowed him to give the other some uneasiness.

The spinster acts the part of hostess, though one can easily see how anxious she is to see that her niece shall be pleased in everything.

Although the meal is rather formal, because there are so many elements present that refuse to blend, it is finished at length—they adjourn to another room which looks out upon a stretch of open land—beyond lies a piazza upon which the gentlemen can walk up and down while enjoying their cigars.

Bob Pemberton does not avail himself of the privilege—he feels a thousand per cent. better since dining, and can even think of the business that has drawn him from Gotham to a point in the mountains far beyond Denver.

He glances around him—Senator John has occupied the attention of the spinster—the coast seems clear. Bob looks into the face of Gypsy Gordon.

"I want to speak to you in private—I have just learned that you are Miss Gordon—it is of the utmost importance that we should not appear to be talking confidentially. Manage it with the same dexterity

you showed in bowling over my panther," he says, laughing.

"I do not understand what it means, but you can trust me," she replies. "There are some photographs of hunting scenes over upon that table in the alcove —perhaps you would like to look at them—unless you've had enough hunting for the present."

"This day's experience will always remain in my memory, but I am not easily discouraged. I will look at the pictures," and he follows her across the apartment.

Through the window the Virginian eyes them while he smokes his Havana and chats with Monsieur Merle, the acute French lawyer, but, as yet, he sees no cause for action.

"Now tell me what it all means—why do four men who appear so antagonistic, come to Hawk's Nest at about the same time?"

"Can you give no guess?" he asks, holding up a picture to the light as though deeply interested in the stirring scene represented.

"How should I unless——" and she looks at him with a sudden startled glance.

"I beg you to be calm. I feel that Livingstone is watching us. When you are your own brave self I shall be ready to tell my news."

"Go on—I have steeled my nerves."

"Steady now—your grandfather, Rudolph Gordon, is dead—your past life has been free from care—now trouble and dangers menace you."

"I understand at last—Heaven guard me."

CHAPTER IV.

THE VIRGINIAN HOODWINKED.

The girl remains wonderfully calm under such circumstances; but it is what Bob has really expected, after seeing her actions during that trying period when the eager flames rolled after them in the woods.

Though full of anxiety, she has the strength to hold up a picture representing some comical hunting scene, and her merry laugh rings through the room.

"You have a story to tell me, Bob Pemberton?"

"Yes, but not now, not here. Oh! if I had but known Gypsy Gordon was the party I came to find what an opportunity I had to relate the singular adventure that befell me not long since, a recital closely connected with the fate of that strange old man you called grandfather."

"Then we must find the opportunity, for hear it I shall. Yes, your news has opened my eyes in more than one respect—I can give a Yankee guess why Cousin Guy is here."

"To forestall the coming of the news—to look out for his share of the legacy."

"And this queer old Frenchman who makes so many faces and wears such gaudy cravats, strutting up and down like a turkey cock—what has he to do with it all?"

"Monsieur Merle is a lawyer—he is on the track

of big game. I believe he had something to do with your grandfather's enormous estate—at least, it seems that as soon as the news of the old gentleman's death was made public, this man of law starts out to discover Miss Estelle Gordon, with some deep purpose of his own. Some singular fate brings us all here together—funny, isn't it?—laugh again, for I see him looking through the window as if he suspects us."

She does laugh.

"Leave it to me—I will find an opportunity very soon," and just then the Virginian saunters into the room, having thrown away his half-consumed cigar.

It is evident that he means to keep in the field himself, and not leave it to another, but when he enters the lists against Gypsy Gordon he undertakes more than he can master.

Trust a girl for managing men, even one who has apparently never mixed with society. She knows by instinct how to manipulate matters, so as to accomplish all she sets out to perform.

In a short time she has managed it so that the Virginian is drawn into a game of cards, with her aunt, the lawyer and Senator Jones for company.

Guy Livingstone would not have joined the game, only he believed that Gypsy was to be his partner in it, and once in he cannot very well get out again.

This leaves the coast clear.

Bob Pemberton is sitting in the bay window admiring some sketches he found in a portfolio. He can give a shrewd guess as to the artist, and is both amazed and delighted at the boldness of their execu-

tion, for once upon a time Bob came very near following that profession as a livelihood, being peculiarly adapted to it. Circumstances threw him in the way of entering Wall street, and thus his course of life was changed, though at odd times since he has done a little sketching.

Gypsy has vanished—she is waiting until the party become interested in their game, and then she appears at Bob's side.

"You audacious man—who gave you permission to look at my work?"

"I beg pardon—have I done wrong?—but I am decidedly interested. You have a free touch and the true conception of an artist."

Then he proceeds to praise and criticise in a manner that astonishes and delights her.

"You are an artist?" she cries.

"Yes, in the Stock Exchange—I am a Wall street operator, and do you know the idea has more than once occurred to me that I made a great mistake in choosing my profession—in other words that a good artist was spoiled to make a poor financier."

"I shall be indeed glad to have you give me some ideas—I am very much engrossed with the work—but not now. There is something more important to be looked into. I have made the opportunity you desired—now tell me about your adventure—how you came to know of the grandfather—of Gypsy Gordon."

He glances around, and for the first time notices what a delightful little party has gathered at the

other end of the room—glances up just in time to see Livingstone look that way and frown.

"Did you do that? I give you credit for being a good general. What a game they will play. Each side of this case is well represented there."

"But tell me about Rudolph Gordon—you know how deeply I am interested."

"I do, indeed. It is a queer story in one sense, and shows how the lives of some people run together, drawn by an invisible force, just as drops of quicksilver upon a smooth surface will move toward each other."

His expression had more meaning in it than his words, and the girl, looking back at the strange manner of their coming together, realizes the truth of what he says.

"Go on."

"Being utterly worn out by my work, a couple of weeks ago I resolved to take a holiday. Chance, and the invitation of Tom Baxter, took me to Virginia. This old friend of mine had married and settled down on a farm in the richest part of the State, and he lured me there with glowing accounts of quail shooting, of which sport I used to be very fond.

"I decided to go, and turned up at Tom's house one evening, to his delight, and the consternation of his little wife, who feared her culinary department might not be in exact order for the advent of a New Yorker, which notion must have been knocked out of her head when she saw the ferocious assault I made upon the supper, at which we were soon seated.

"Let me avoid unnecessary details and get down to

business as soon as possible. I put a day in with the quail, lost my way, and at dark turned up at a grand old mansion which I knew must be the Gordon manor."

The girl listens eagerly.

"It was with the intention of asking my way that I entered the grounds and advanced toward the building, for I had no desire to spend the night in the woods.

"The house was dark, save in one quarter, where I could see the gleam of a lamp, shining through a window.

"Tom had told me something of the strange man who lived there, and I was prepared for some sort of experience in the event of my running across him.

"When midway between the house and the long range of stables, I heard some one running and muttering to himself. Another moment and a negro came banging up against me.

"'Hello!' I said. 'What's up?'

"The fellow's knees began to knock together, he was that badly scared, but seeing I was a white man, he suddenly changed his tune and besought me to follow him into the house, declaring he had just been about to get a horse and ride for a neighbor.

"From what he said I imagined old Squire Gordon must be dying. He had lived here a strange life, with no companions, and only his faithful servants, some of them former slaves, around him, but at the approach of the grim monster, Death, a sudden desire to see and talk with some one of his own race had come upon him.

"I followed the darkey into the house, and in a

few minutes was ushered into the room where I first saw your grandfather, the eccentric millionaire, and owner of Gordon manor.

"I needn't tell you how I was impressed, for every one whoever came in contact with the old gentleman must have been struck that way.

"He was in bed, bolstered up, and looked like a very sick man, though there was no doctor present.

"At sight of me he sat up and called out:

" 'Well, sir, who are you?'

"I explained how I happened to be near by when his man was starting for a white man, and that he had brought me in.

"The old gentleman was eying me closely from under his bushy brows all the while, and when I finished he burst out with:

" 'You will do—I believe Heaven must have sent you to me in this hour. Draw up a chair. I have much to say to you. What is your name?'

"I told him, and begged that I might go for some of his neighbors or friends, at which he burst into a fierce laugh.

" 'Friends—Squire Gordon has none save the old school-teacher, and for whom Octavius was going when he met you. Friends—I distrust them all—they think of my money only—I knew no peace until I got rid of all but honest black friends and servants—and only precious little then. Sit down and listen, while I tell you strange things, you whom Heaven has sent here in this hour, which may be my last.'

"I could not refuse—besides, I confess, something like curiosity urged me to remain.

"He began to speak rapidly; every little while he would make an imperious motion with his hand, and I would give him a taste of the contents of a glass, which seemed to renew his strength.

"Miss Gordon, there is probably no reason why I should repeat what he said to me—you know the story of your home in all its weirdness, and I must confess it aroused more interest with me than any novel I had ever read."

"There is no necessity—I know all. Go on and tell me what you did," she says, quietly, but with intense eagerness.

"When he had finished he asked me point blank if I would search for his grandchild, and place a packet in her hand—a packet of great value to her, and which he would be loath to give into the possession of most people, but which he believed he could trust with me.

"I was flattered by his words, and intensely interested in his story—at the time I was ready to promise anything, everthing. That is how I accepted the trust; that is why I am here to-night. Senator John, the best old fellow under the sun, accompanies me as a free lance, always ready for an adventure, and a man who has seen every odd thing in the world.

"As to Guy Livingstone, your cousin, and the old French lawyer, I fancy their story would be of a different tenor from mine, could they be prevailed upon to speak."

"I am sure of it. There are many things connected with this matter about which you know nothing, and at present I cannot tell you. I thank you for what

you have done—I even have assurance enough to ask a continuance of your friendship."

Bob is under a spell while her bright eyes meet his, and ready to promise all that a brave and honorable man should. He gave his word to Rudolph Gordon, the grandfather; he renews it with the remarkable forest nymph whose acquaintance he has made in such a singular manner.

All this while there is one near by who is figuratively on nettles. It is the Virginian. He has been hoodwinked by the artful Gypsy into joining the game of euchre, and it is now impossible for him to leave without breaking up the game.

He casts dozens of black looks in the direction of the corner where the two sit; he plays a miserable game, and is compelled to assume a gayety he far from feels, in order to deceive the others of the party.

If Monsieur Merle is inwardly disturbed, he does not show it outwardly; his sphinx-like, parchment face discloses no emotion; the fires of Hades might rage within, but on the surface all is a polished calm. Ah! he is a deep plotter, this diplomatic French lawyer; his game is deeper than that of the Virginian, and he will win it, too, unless Gypsy Gordon and her newly found ally prove to be made of better material than himself.

The game ends at last—that with the cards, for the real one, with human figures or opposing chessmen, has only begun, and Livingstone loses no time in seeking the presence of his cousin—but that hour costs him dear.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL WHO DARED.

The remainder of the evening is passed in conversation, for whatever motives may be deep beneath the surface, those who are present have the power and faculty of at least appearing at their ease in good society.

Miss Estelle may wonder what it is that brings them here, she may even suspect that some of them have intentions that concern the inhabitants of Hawk's Nest, but she is a lady, and acts the part of a hostess.

Hospitality is apparently a part of her nature, and no gentleman could ever leave the shelter of a house where she had any control, with night settled down, —especially when the forest stretched around on every hand.

Bob makes no further effort to have a private conversation with the young girl, nor could he have done so had he chosen, with the shrewd Virginian watching.

Since Gypsy had been so remarkably successful with regard to making an opportunity for an exchange of views, he feels disposed to trust her for the future.

If she wants to see more of him, depend upon it,

she will accomplish the fact in spite of all the Livingstones and Monsieur Merles in the wide world.

Somehow, Bob entertains a remarkably good opinion of the young girl—what he has seen of her influences him in this way—the double adventure of the late afternoon—how few girls could have shown such courage in the face of danger?

When the time for retiring comes, Gypsy rings for servants, who appear.

"Marc Anthony, show these gentlemen to the Blue Room. Cæsar, these gentlemen will occupy the Red Room. This is only a forest lodge, remember, and pardon the absence of luxuries."

All of them, of course, at once protest against such apologies, declaring they had never dreamed such a wonderful habitation could be met with so deep in the wilderness, and that there is really nothing the heart could wish for that they have not found close at hand.

Bob surveys his room with curiosity; it is plainly but neatly furnished, and the prevailing color being red has given it a name.

As for Senator John, his interest is wholly taken up with the bed upon which he means to pass the next seven hours, and the grunt of satisfaction which he gives proves beyond a doubt that he anticipates a better night than the last one spent at a country tavern.

Bob has little to say, for his mind is wholly taken up with thoughts of Gypsy and her destiny.

Only a few hours before and he had never set eyes on the girl; now it seems as though he has known

her for years; the same old, old story again, which seems never to get out of fashion—which began with the regard Adam had for Eve, and will continue to the time of the last man and woman on earth.

As he sits there at the window, he hears a sound behind—lo! honest Senator John has actually gone to sleep while seated in his chair, engaged in surveying the bed which promised him such a comfortable night's rest.

Bob is about to take the hint when his attention is attracted toward something he sees outside. The moon has wheeled above the horizon, and the darkness that succeeded the great forest fire has given way under her magic spell.

What he sees is a moving figure—a man. Bob, of course, does not know what the habits of these good people are when at their lodge in the heart of the forest, but he is inclined to believe there is something singular about this fact, so he watches the man with curiosity, himself concealed from view.

The man seems to skulk around—his very actions arouses Bob's suspicions still more. Have the inmates of the Hawk's Nest enemies who would do them harm—perhaps some unfaithful servant, seeking to avenge his fancied wrongs, comes skulking around with the intention of burning the house.

Bob is awake to the emergency. The light burns low in the room, and Senator John snores.

It happens that the window at which Bob sits is on the shaded side of the house, facing the west. There is also a very easy way of reaching the ground, to such an agile man.

The notion comes suddenly, and he resolves to follow this shadowy figure, in order to better satisfy his mind with regard to the motive that brings the fellow here.

In five minutes from the time he decides upon this move, he lands upon the ground outside, and the thing has been neatly done, too.

Glancing around, he finds that the shadowy figure still skulks near by, having, meanwhile, approached closer to the house.

Bob is more than ever convinced that the man means mischief, and congratulates himself upon his wakefulness. Sometimes it pays to be thinking about a girl's face.

The man aims to reach the shadow which conceals Bob, and soon accomplishes the task. Then he mutters something that sounds like satisfaction, as though he has attained some cherished object.

What will he do next—attempt to set fire to the house? Bob sees him stoop and pick something up from the ground—possibly a pebble, for he casts it upward, and the listener hears is strike glass above.

Then a head is thrust out, as though the signalling has been heard, a soft whistle sounds on the night air, and is repeated below.

Noiselessly the man descends in about the same way Bob did; it is an easy job for an agile party.

This means treachery in the house, and certainly needs looking after. Bob feels that he is the right man in the proper place, and is ready to devote his energies toward serving the girl who has crossed his path so strangely.

The two shadowy figures put their heads close together; in vain does he strain his hearing; it is impossible to catch even a word, so that he must depend more upon their actions than anything else in order to get at the root of their trouble.

They move away, following the wall of the wooden building, but he does not believe it is their intention to leave the premises.

Just as he is about to follow, Bob's keen ears catch what seems to be the closing of a door, though the sound is so faint that it can hardly be distinguished from the soughing of the wind in the pines.

Half believing he must have made a mistake, he starts on, when he sees a movement just ahead, as though one of the couple has dropped behind, or else a new figure came into the game.

Then some one must have come out of the house. Bob looks closer, as a sudden suspicion flashes into his brain, and then under his breath he exclaims:

"It must be Gypsy!"

He notes that the figure is small; if a man he wears a long black cloak, but Bob has full confidence that his first guess is right.

It would be just like the girl, too; she has the qualities of a heroine in her composition, and in any emergency would be found taking a leading part.

His interest increases, for he feels that he may yet be called upon to defend her.

A unique chase it is, each party ignorant of the fact that another follows—a chase that is bound to end in some climax.

The two men, having arrived at that part of the

building where the southwest breeze strikes it, have come to a halt. They bend low and talk in whispers; their very actions proclaim their motives dishonorable, for men who are bent upon reputable business do not creep around and whisper together at such an hour of the night. Now they seem to be engaged in some work that requires united action; a portion of the long, wooden piazza lies here, and they seem to be drawing something out, something that is not unlike dried grass, and which crackles as they press it into a pile.

Pemberton's suspicions were positively true, then; these rascals, bent on mischief, are for destroying Hawk's Nest.

He feels the blood boil in his veins with indignation; it is a crime that merits severe punishment anywhere, and in this western country death would be the penalty inflicted should a man be caught in the act.

Then he remembers that there is another in the game, and wonders what action she will take, for he has made up his mind as to the identity of the figure ahead.

It is soon known.

A crackling sound is heard, a sound that can be made under no other conditions than when a match is drawn over a rough surface. Then a light flashes up, proving that such a condition of affairs exists.

The light gives away the whole business, and Bob Pemberton sees a pile of dead grass, with two human forms bending over it; even their faces are exposed, though strange to him.

Guilt does not like to be seen; darkness suits it better, and the men look at one another in a kind of sudden alarm.

"Apply the fire," says one, gruffly.

"Not just yet," comes in a quiet voice.

The match drops to the earth, and expires without accomplishing its purpose. Who has spoken? Bob need not ask the question, for he sees that cloaked figure advance.

It is Gypsy.

The two men appear dumfounded; they utter no word, nor is there an attempt made at flight. Bob chuckles as he imagines their feelings; she would not be in their shoes and face that indignant girl for worlds.

"Ralph Rollins, I did not expect you to sting the hand that fed you. This is rank treachery—you are an ingrate!"

The man cowers under her stinging words; it is like a lash applied.

"Who is this miserable fellow, this wretch who has tempted you to betray your friends? I ought to know—I will know."

As quick as the words she speaks, Gypsy Gordon strikes a match and holds it so that the light flashes upon their faces; the action is so unexpectedly sudden that they do not have the sense to draw back.

"Amos Peterman, and here! This is some more of the same work I unearthed last summer at Denver. You follow me even here. Once for all, tell me why this hatred—why this desire for revenge? I never wronged you—it is against my nature to wrong any

one. Live and let live has been my motto. Have you both lost your tongues? Speak!"

They writhe in their abasement, but open not their mouths.

"Shame on you, for men, to war upon a girl. If you must plot and do evil, pick out those who can meet you openly. I have not been in ignorance—I suspected something of this sort when I saw Ralph Rollins climbing down from the servants' quarters. You see I came prepared."

She holds something up; her arm comes into the flood of moonlight, and that something proves to be a short riding whip, almost as stoutly built as a cowhide.

"Would you lay that on us, Miss Gypsy?" whines the fellow called Rollins, a sneaking hypocrite, a canting coward and turn coat, ready to betray his best friend for money.

"It is my nature to abhor treachery; I would sooner cut off my right hand than betray one who has befriended me. I would teach you a lesson; I mean to show you that I am mistress here, and Gypsy Gordon can punish as well as reward."

Bob is ready to shout "amen" to that; never in all his life has he run across a girl whose spirit shines out like this. Who could help admiring her—almost worshiping her?

"Have a care, miss!" growls the man whom she has called Amos Peterman.

"Of what?"

"You don't know the men you face; you wouldn't dare lay that lash on me."

She laughs contemptuously.

"You are a coward, or you wouldn't be engaged in such work as this. It never enters my mind to regard such a man any more than the snake I tread on with my heel. You have pursued me with a vindictiveness that can only spring from the fact that you are employed by another to injure me. Tell your employer, whoever that person may be, that Gypsy Gordon stands ready to deal him out the same treatment (lash) she bestows on the reptile he employs (lash) and you, also, Ralph Rollins."

The whip desends with furious force upon the shoulders of the two crouching , would be incendiaries; it comes so suddenly that they are bewildered, and do not attempt to avoid their punishment, although writhing under it as might so many curs, for the lash is wielded with no little force, and doubtless stings as it falls upon their necks and shoulders.

"Death and furies!" exclaims Amos.

"Mercy!" whines the miserable Ralph.

The little whip keeps up the same time, and it is evident that Gypsy Gordon means to impress the lesson on her unwilling pupils in a manner they will not soon forget.

As for Bob, that amused individual can hardly repress a shout—he feels like clapping his hands and cheering the girl on who dares stand up for her rights, and giving vent to the cry of "bravo" that trembles on his lips.

Still he refrains; this is her business, and until it becomes absolutely necessary, he must not interfere.

At the same time he pushes nearer, and quietly re-

moves his coat and rolls up his shirt sleeves as might a gladiator ere commencing his work in the ring.

Ralph Rollins, after receiving a few lashes, rolls over on the ground, groaning, then scrambles to his knees, finds himself beyond the reach of the little whip, regains his feet, and speeds away.

Hawk's Nest will know him no longer; it would be a decidedly unhealthy region for a man of his size, caught in such a despicable act.

Amos Peterman, the fellow who has pursued such a strange, vindictive course toward the young owner of the forest lodge, has more of the wolf in his nature. He forgets all save the fact that he is being lashed with scorpions, for the riding whip leaves a welt wherever it curls around his face or neck.

So, with the savage growl of a beast, he struggles to his feet and rushes at the girl, when she is suddenly but firmly pushed to one side, and the wretch faces a man—faces Bob Pemberton.

CHAPTER VI.

TOLD UNDER THE MOON.

The situation instantly assumes another phase in the eyes of Amos; he could dare when the object of his wrath was a frail slip of a girl, but it is a different matter to find himself face to face with a man, who has doffed his coat, and evidently prepared himself for a battle royal.

He gives one look, and believing discretion the better part of valor, proceeds to beat as hasty a retreat as even Ralph Rollins could boast.

Bob makes a start after him; his blood is on fire to avenge the insult put upon the young girl by a wretch who would even dare strike her, but a soft voice calls:

"Bob Pemberton, come here; I want you."

And Bob immediately slackens his furious pace, comes to a halt, turns, and retraces his steps. When he faces Gypsy Gordon he finds her laughing; the ridiculous side of the question has appealed to her nature; for the time being she ignores the graver issue.

"You look as though ready for business," she exclaims, as Bob resumes his coat and thus disposes of his belligerent appearance.

"I'm only sorry I failed to get hold of the rascal—I'll regret it to my dying day."

"Don't you think I punished him quite enough?" she asks, quietly.

Bob remembers how that little riding whip whistled through the air each time it fell with cutting emphasis upon the face and neck of the coward Amos, and he shrugs his shoulders.

"Well, I reckon he'll be pretty sore over it—yes, you gave him what he deserved, Miss Gypsy, but I feel as though I should have liked to have had a finger in the pie."

"Wait—you may yet have plenty of chances to defeat the plans of such a schemer. The end is not yet—his employer is not in this affair for an hour or a day, but a lifetime. When you know the whole story, Bob Pemberton, you will understand that this strange incident which you have seen to-night is only one of a long list of similar occurrences, aimed against the owner of Hawk's Nest."

"But there must be an object for such base operations—a deep object, I am sure."

"And you are quite right. Perhaps you might find it hard to believe, from my manner, that I am persecuted as few girls have ever been, but you have seen enough of me to see that trouble will not stick to me any more than water on a duck's back; my nature is such that the bright side of things always appeals to me. I am merry under most discouraging circumstances, and, even after the experience of this night, when a trusted servant has turned upon me, I am not despondent."

"A wonderful and enviable disposition to have. I

confess you astonish me at every turn. I never chanced to meet a young woman just like you."

"Ah! there is but one Gypsy Gordon," she says, with a nod, and Pemberton agrees with her.

"This was a monstrous thing for them to attempt. Why, any or all of us might have been burned to death in our beds."

"Hardly that—I think his motive was more one of pecuniary loss—something to frighten me."

"But the house is built of wood, and, once afire, would burn like tinder. It was a deed that merits severe punishment."

She looks at him in a peculiar way.

"What would you think if I told you that this is the fourth time I have been able to defeat this unseen enemy, in some such scheme?"

"I am amazed—you, a girl, without any assistance, baffle such conspirators. I begin to lose the firm belief I have always had in the superiority of my sex. You unite the good qualities of your own with the better ones of masculine humanity—bravery and independence. I wish——"

"What?" quickly.

"That you would let me embark with you in this mysterious crusade against your enemies. I have a strong arm—I know your heart is brave, but some time they might catch you napping. Anyhow, two are better than one."

Gypsy drops her head to one side, a habit peculiar to herself, and seems to cogitate.

"Well, I don't know why I shouldn't, since it seems decreed by fate that we should share dangers,

to some extent. Of course, in that event, I will have to tell you everything."

"Everything," he echoes.

"By degrees, of course. Told at once, I am afraid it would demoralize you. I have found, at times, that it does not take much more than a pretty face to turn the head of an ordinary man."

"Don't be malicious, Miss Gordon—I admit the impeachment; but this is a strange place in which to be talking. Hadn't we better return to the house—no one seems to have been aroused by the sounds of battle, though."

"We can talk here—it is as good a place as any, for there is no chance of being overheard. You wonder who this strange enemy can be—the person who thus tries to create alarm and terror in me."

"I confess to having some curiosity. You have enemies, it is plain. I only know Livingstone."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no! it is not Cousin Guy. His motive is one of greedy gain—it is the wealth left by Rudolph Gordon he covets. This person who is responsible for the several peculiar attacks upon my property has another design—revenge."

"What have you ever done to injure him—I don't see how any man could hate you?"

"Stupid," she says, quickly. "The gold that crossed Ralph Rollins' palm came from a woman's purse."

"I begin to see light."

"You think she is jealous—that I have destroyed her chances with some man. That is where you go

astray. To my knowledge, I have never harmed her. The bitter feeling she cherishess comes from another source. I will briefly relate it.

"The fortune that is in my hands came to me through my mother—there was a sad mistake, and a certain woman whom I shall call Josephine believed for a year that all was hers. Then my lawyers put in a claim, the proofs were overwhelming, and I came into possession of the Armitage estate.

"I felt sorry for Josephine, and even offered her a share of the property, but she spurned it, and declared she would have all or none. As a side issue, a foolish young man to whom she was engaged thought he was in love with me. I laughed at him and sent him back to her, but she hates me doubly on account of his foolish fancy. There, in a nutshell, you have the reason of her animosity. She does not seek my life—I have never believed so, at least—but I know Josephine would rejoice at the loss of my fortune, or some accident that would disfigure my face for life."

"Has she attempted that?" exclaimed Bob Pemberton.

"I am ashamed of my sex when I declare, deliberately, that I fear it is so. On one occasion, a girl in my employ, while in Denver, was led, by some unhappy fate, to wear a dress of mine—at the time I was away. In the street some man threw vitriol in her face, and she was horribly disfigured for life."

"What a fiend passion makes of its victims," said Bob, aghast at her recital.

"You see what I have to fight against."

"Yes, and most persons would be distracted by the terrible situation, while you act as though there was no evil on earth."

"I cannot help it—my nature will not allow me to be cast down, no matter how serious the condition may be. I have reason to believe Josephine will confide in Cousin Guy, and my apprehension is that all of them will form a league against me—they will endeavor to prevent my going to Virginia to claim my grandfather's estate."

"Let them try it—you have allies, too, in Senator John and Bob Pemberton. If we don't prove a match for all their scheming then we deserve to lose the case. You have told me much, already—you will, I am sure, confide even more in me as time passes."

"How can I help it—I was of some assistance to you—and you canceled the debt by saving my life in the forest fire."

"Nonsense—I——"

"The thought has even occurred to me that this fearful fire might be traced to her hands."

"Really, I can well believe it, since you have told me these various things she has done. This Josephine is a remarkable woman."

"In more senses than one. She was an actress a few years ago, and might have made a fortune on the stage if she had not conceived the mad idea of securing the inheritance left by my mother. Her last act has been the crowning one of all. You will hardly believe me when I tell it."

"I can believe anything, after what I have seen here—besides, it comes from you."

The delicate compliment contained in this last is not lost upon Gypsy, who gives him a little courtesy.

"Thanks. I hope you will always have that high opinion of me," she says.

"I wish you would leave this wilderness and go back to Denver."

"Wherefore? The same danger pursues me there as here—indeed, I have even fancied it was worse in the city. For months I have known and fought against the combination."

"You, a lonely girl, battle with such powers of darkness—it amazes me. I am cured of my silly belief in man's superiority. I humbly beg that you will allow me to assist in the work of defeating your enemies."

"Gladly. Already I experience a feeling of relief at the prospect of having a sincere friend in whom I may confide my troubles and who will assist me in any emergency. I have succeeded in defeating the powers allied against me in the past, but the clouds are gathering more densely, and I fear for the future if I must struggle against them alone and unaided. It was bad enough when the evil lay outside—at least I could depend upon an asylum in my own house. Now that prop is knocked from under my feet, since treachery has invaded Hawk's Nest."

"Meaning the fellow who ran away with such speed—Ralph Rollins, you called him."

"He is one."

"What! are there more, then?"

"Ah! my friend, I made an accidental discovery this very day that has both pained and distressed me.

My eyes have been blind of late—I knew not the enemy could be so bold."

"Now you mean—Josephine. I really must see this woman—surely, she is a marvel—having set her heart on a game, she is ready to risk everything she possesses in order to win."

"That is Josephine Armitage to a dot. All the powers of earth cannot move her—only absolute defeat will crush such a woman. You say you would like to see her?"

"Yes."

"You have already done so," in a low voice that thrills Bob strangely.

"Where—when—I don't remember."

"Ah! she deceived me for seven days, and acted her part to perfection. I shall tell you presently how I found her out before I went to the woods to-day."

"She is here—in Hawk's Nest?"

"Yes."

"A servant?"

"Not at all, but calmly and deliberately acting the part of the aunt I had never seen when I sent for her. The lady you met as Miss Gordon is Josephine Armitage."

CHAPTER VII.

BOB PEMBERTON IN THE WRONG ROOM.

The intelligence is so stunning that Bob hardly knows whether he is dreaming or not.

"Bless my soul, this lady looks forty-five if a day, and yet I judge, from what you have told me, that Josephine must be a young woman," he says.

"Ah! you forget she was a bright actress. She knows how to make up to deceive more suspicious eyes than mine. Hatred such as hers is capable of anything. Since making this dreadful discovery I have been wandering in the forest, more because I desired a chance to ponder over the strange facts and lay out a plan of action, than I had any desire to shoot game. Thus fate threw us together."

"But you cannot go on living in this way with such a merciless woman under your roof. The next time her evil designs may succeed. What will you do—send her away?"

"I have not yet decided. In spite of the great wrongs she has done me, yet I am sorry for her. I shall make one last attempt to change her heart, and if that is a failure——"

"Well?"

"Then I must resort to other methods for my life is in danger."

How quietly she speaks—Bob Pemberton is more

than ever thrilled with a consciousness of her power, her individuality. Truly there is but one Gypsy Gordon in all this wide world. He is ready to thank the fate that brought him in contact with this charming person, and is ready to agree with the poet, who wrote:

"There is a Divinity
That shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we will."

That visit to Virginia—his getting lost and discovering the Gordon Manor at dusk—his interview with eccentric old Rudolph on his dying bed, and acceptance of the latter's trust—all these are merely phases of the road over which Fortune is daily and hourly leading him in the maddest chase he ever knew. The goal—well, Bob begins to realize what it means now, and can even give a vague guess as to what old Rudolph meant, when, after so closely inspecting him on that night, and learning that he was a bachelor, he muttered, in a grim sort of way:

"I imagine he will save her."

"Perhaps we had better go in now," remarks the man from New York, although he would not offer any objections to a longer *tete-a-tete* with this wonderful girl of theforest Eden.

"Shall I show you the way?" she asks.

"I had better go back as I came, since the door of our room is locked, and I would not like to disturb the slumbers of dear old John. He does look so very contented and happy when asleep."

"You are sure of your bearings—I remember that

you have a weakness for getting lost," she says, with a malicious little laugh.

"A lucky failing it turned out, too. Oh! don't take any worry about me, I beg. I shall go up as easily as I came down, and no one will be the wiser. Good-night, Miss Gypsy."

He holds out his hand, and she quickly places her little brown member in it.

"Remember, that I am in this business with a vengeance. I brought the message from Gordon Manor, and after what happened to-day, it is only just and proper that I should have your confidence, at least, so long as I merit it."

She looks the bold fellow in the face frankly.

"You do—you shall. Good-night, Mr. Pemberton, and may you have pleasant dreams."

Then she snatches her hand away before he can make a reply, and vanishes beyond the doorway.

Bob smiles—he can afford to, since the game seems to be playing into his hands. Then he turns his attention toward the business he has in view.

It took him just five minutes to get down from the window of the Red Room, and surely he ought to recover that ground in twice the time. By the way, which is the window—he was so very sure of it a minute ago when talking with the eccentric granddaughter of old Rudolph Gordon, the wealthy Virginia recluse, and yet he is ready to confess some little doubt with regard to it now.

Stepping back, he eyes the windows above.

"Let me see, did I turn to the right or left—it was

the latter, of course. Yes, I recognize the line I took along that edge—here goes."

His limbs are rather stiff and sore from the tremendous exertions of the day, but Bob is something of an athlete, being a tried and true member of the Manhattan Athletic Club, when at home in New York.

He skirmishes up the water pipe to the shed, luckily on the darkened side of the house. Before the ten minutes are up he has reached the window he seeks and seems perfectly satisfied that there has been no mistake made. So he swings a leg over the sill, and enters as quietly as he can, not wishing to disturb the slumbers of Senator John.

No sooner has he really entered the room than he becomes conscious of two things that give him an uneasy feeling. As well as he can remember the room they occupied was scented with the odor of the Havana he smoked, while Senator John slept in his chair. This apartment, on the contrary, is delightfully perfumed with violets or new-mown hay.

A cold chill creeps up and down Bob's spinal column—can he, after all, have made a ridiculous blunder and entered the wrong room? He listens—surely, if he has not, a certain sound should be heard, telling him so—the nasal trumpet of his stout comrade, the man who has been in every country under the sun, and retains mementoes of each.

Bob listens with his heart in his mouth.

He thinks he hears a slight rustling sound, but, beyond that, and the murmur of the wind in the

branches of trees outside, all is still. So he ventures to give vent to a whispered call:

"John, old fellow, where are you?"

In answer, a peculiar sound greets him—it is a rasping noise, as of something being drawn over sand paper—something that instantly bursts into a blaze—a match.

Poor Bob holds his breath—the embarrassing nature of his position gives him a shock such as he can never remember receiving before. What does he see—well, the blazing match discloses, within fifteen feet of him, the face of Miss Estelle, or, as he knows her now, Josephine Armitage. She is dressed in a wrapper, with her hair down her back—she looks almost twenty years younger than in the daytime—a fact Bob can readily understand, after having heard the story of Gypsy Gordon.

That face now blazes with mixed emotions—the light of the tiny torch reveals amazement, contempt, and even deep satisfaction, but not alarm. Thus, for a dozen seconds, these two look at one another. Bob, with a sense of humiliation over the bad break he has, in his stupidity, made, and the spinster with perfect self-control.

"So, it is you, Mr. Pemberton, who, at the hour of midnight——"

"Miss Gordon!" he exclaims.

"Creeps into the room of a lady in the style of a burglar. Do you seek my rings, my watch, my jewelry—they all lie yonder on the dresser."

How these bitter words cut.

"It is a foolish—a ridiculous blunder, Miss Gor-

don, I assure you," he pursues, gradually getting his head again, as he remembers that at least Gypsy will believe him, and, really, that is all he cares about.

"Perhaps so, my dear sir," and the match, having done its duty, expires; "but every one will not believe so should I scream and hold on to you thus," upon which she suddenly catches his arm with both hands.

Bob Pemberton realizes that he has a desperate woman to deal with, and that if he desires to come out of this little affair with honor, he must keep his wits about him.

He preserves his coolness, which is very wise.

"Madam, it is true you might give me some little inconvenience by the course you suggest, but I am not sure it would not hurt you fully as much. In the first place, I can prove the truth of my assertion that, in endeavoring to regain my room by way of the window, I made a mistake and turned to the left when I should have gone to the right."

"A very plausible explanation, but my dear sir, are gentlemen in New York in the habit of climbing in and out of windows of their room when they visit country houses?"

The sneer is very perceptible in her voice.

Bob is at once impressed with the ridiculous side of the matter, and he actually laughs softly.

"It does seem out of all reason, and I confess the action looks suspicious, but I beg to assure you that Miss Gypsy Gordon will vouch for the fact that I aimed to clamber in at the window of my own room when I made the blunder."

"Gypsy—what does she know about it?" demands the other, suddenly, and her voice grows even harder than usual, if that can be possible.

"I see I must tell you the story before you will consent to let me leave here and seek my own apartments."

"Oh, certainly. If there is a story, relate it, but please be brief. I am not in the habit of receiving gentlemen in a dressing gown."

She releases his arm, however. The room is not wholly dark, now that his eyes have become accustomed to it, for the moonlight outside is in a measure reflected through the window.

"I was sitting at my window, smoking—Senator John had gone to sleep in his chair, when my attention was attracted by a moving figure in the moonlight below. Watching the man, I became convinced that he meant some evil, and, seeing how easily I could reach the ground, I determined to follow and see what he was up to.

"This I did. Presently he was joined by a man from the house, and the two conferred together. Just as they were about setting fire to some brush and dead leaves gathered against the side of the house, Miss Gypsy appeared and gave both of them a good hiding, while I watched the fun until they ran away."

He can hear something like the grating of teeth, but takes no notice of the sound.

"Well?" she says, with an effort.

"I congratulated Miss Gypsy on her proficiency with the riding whip, and regretted that the rascals had proven too cowardly to give me a show. Then I

set about climbing up to my room, as we had the door locked, and I did not care to disturb poor old Senator John. You know the rest."

"Yes, I know the rest. A very specious story you tell, Mr. Pemberton. I must confess it is too tough a morsel for one like myself to successfully grapple with."

"Ah! you choose not to believe it. Very good. I must again wish you good-night."

"No, you shall not go yet—I will call out and alarm the house. You are in my power—you shall tell me what brought you here, to this isolated lodge in the wilderness—I demand it."

"That is business which concerns another party, and I do not choose to betray the confidence bestowed upon me."

"I shall insist upon it. Leave this room you shall not until I hear all."

She is determined, and Bob sees there is nothing for him to do but to play the last stroke he has held in reserve, a course he would rather avoid, if possible, as it throws him into the game, and makes a mortal enemy out of this sheming actress who has deceived Gypsy with such rare tact. That time has now come, and, to save himself from the unpleasant consequences that must necessarily follow the threatened outcry on the part of the spinster, he feels compelled to touch off his reserved bomb.

"You are mistaken, my dear lady—you will gladly allow me to leave this room in peace, in return for a promise on my part not to betray your secret."

He speaks calmly, deliberately, as one who knows his power.

"My secret—what do you mean?" comes from the figure before him.

"You sail under false colors."

"Confusion! how much do you know, Bob Pemberton?" she whispers, tragically.

"You are Josephine Armitage, the actress," he says, with great deliberation and indifference.

"Ah! he knows it, this man who enters my window at midnight, this man who comes to Hawk's Nest with a mission for her. I am in his power. Stay! you said you had a price—that you would remain silent if I allowed you to depart from here without raising an alarm. Am I right?"

She is almost breathless from excitement now, and it is evident that the strain tells.

"I promise this—that I will not inform Miss Gypsy of your identity—it must suffice," for he feels safe in doing this, as the young girl already knows all about Josephine.

"It will do—you can go," she mutters, and opposes no further obstruction to his progress.

Bob gets over that window sill with a rapidity that is quite charming to see. He counts himself decidedly lucky to escape her clutches so easily, this plotting woman who seems to hesitate at nothing in order to accomplish her purpose.

Once outside, he knows where he made the mistake that came near costing him so dear, and proceeds to remedy it.

This time he reaches the window that must surely belong to his apartment.

Just as he throws one leg over the sill, and is about to enter, something as cold as ice touches his temple, and a low voice grates:

"Surrender, intruder, or you're a dead man!"

Poor Bob is again in trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ROAD TO DENVER.

Bob gives a groan of despair, and then as suddenly brightens up, as something flashes through his mind —something that gives him immediate relief.

"John, old man, hold your fire," he says.

"Bless my soul, it's Bob, after all. You young rascal, what does this mean—are you working off superfluous muscle in gymnastics, climbing over the roof of this wonderful lodge in a vast wilderness? Explain yourself, my boy."

This Bob is only too ready and willing to do, and dropping into a chair he heaves a tremendous sigh of relief.

"I could a tale unfold that would harrow up your soul and freeze your blood," he says, to which the other responds:

"Well, freeze away, then, dear boy. I'm awfully mixed up about this business. I tell you I awaken from a little nap to hear some one climbing to the window, and when I cover him with a weapon expecting to get game, lo! it turns out to be my friend."

Bob only waits until this little tirade is over, when he starts in. What he has to tell is exciting enough to rivet the attention of his comrade, and not one word falls from the lips of the old traveler until Bob finishes.

Then he relieves the pent-up feelings of his system by an ejaculation.

"Quite a good beginning, Bob, my boy."

"You know I promised you some dramatic developments if you came with me."

"And right nobly are you keeping that promise, what with our getting separated, your series of adventures in the forest, including the escape from roasting, and now, right on top of it comes this queer set of doings. Yes, you have already nobly kept your word."

They converse a while in low tones. The scene from the window of the lodge is charming, as moonlight views are apt to be, but our two travelers are really too tired to remain up much longer. The couch appears inviting, and both soon retire.

It is a long time before the young man loses himself in slumber. The exciting events of the day and night, and the effect Gypsy Gordon has upon his mind, keeps him awake.

Finally, he succumbs to nature and drops asleep, though no doubt in dreams he passes through the same scenes that have occupied his waking hours. Once he awakens and sits up—he is not certain but from the valley road come sounds very like the hoof beats of a galloping horse. Bob takes notice of the fact because he has not forgotten Ralph Rollins, and Amos Peterman, the men who felt the sting of Gypsy Gordon's riding whip earlier in the night. Perhaps they may have laid a plan whereby a couple of horses could be stolen from the stable in order to effect their escape from the country.

Morning at last.

The sun brightens up the landscape, and all nature looks joyous. There is an odor of smoke in the air, coming, perhaps, from the burned timber, and this serves to remind Bob that he should be doubly thankful that he is alive and in a condition to enjoy the beauties of this fall morning. It was a close call, and he can never forget it, any more than he will be able to get from his mind the image of this wonderful girl who already has such a hold on him.

Senator John is outside—whatever his faults may be, tardiness of rising is certainly not among them.

So Bob dresses, and looks more critically than usual at his features, for he passed through a severe ordeal on the former day, both in regard to the fire and his meeting one who seems destined to be his fate.

Down below, he finds the bright girl who owns this remarkable lodge, whose eccentric whim it is to have a home in the wilderness. Gypsy greets him with a smile and a cheery "good-morning" that gives him a new experience.

"I've been waiting for you—there is news," she says, nodding mysteriously.

"Something has happened since I saw you?"

"Yes—guess what it is."

"About—ahem!—Josephine?" with a cautious look around, to make sure that person is not near.

"About Josephine Armitage."

"Has she—gone?"

"You miserable man, to guess it the first shot."

"Well, I remember hearing the tramp of a horse during the night—she went mounted, of course?"

"Yes, on a horse I gave her, as my respected aunt. But, even granted that you did hear a galloping horse, why should that make you think she had left Hawk's Nest?"

"Ah! I have a secret, too. I have certain facts that give me that impression."

"Do you mean to keep it from me?"

"On the contrary, I am only too anxious to confide it to you."

"There is no time like the present. Come, sir, sit down here, and I will play the Father Confessor."

"Only too willingly would I forever breathe my fears and secret longings in the ears of such a confessor," he says, boldly, but she only laughs.

"Please confine your remarks to what concerns us at present," she says.

So he tells of the remarkable incident that befell him while endeavoring to find his room on the previous night, after leaving her. Gypsy smiles at his confusion when admitting his blunder—he had been so confident, as he left her, that he could retrace his passage.

"I understand, now," she declares, when he has concluded the wonderful story, "what she meant in her note—you were the circumstances she feared," and then she produces the note in question, which Josephine left in her room.

He reads:

"MISS GYPSY GORDON:—Since saying good-night, circumstances have arisen that tell me the truth is probably known to you. My plans have, thus far, failed—I hardly know what the future holds for us

both. Were I less determined on a policy of revenge, what I have seen of you in this week's time might have disarmed me—as it is my life is devoted to the one object of retaliation. Through you I lost what I desired most on earth—from my French mother I inherit a nature that will not brook interference. Hence you shall yet suffer, girl. Until we meet again, *au revoir.* JOSEPHINE ARMITAGE.

"P. S.—I take the horse you so kindly gave me. He is yours again when I reach Denver."

As Bob finishes, he hands the letter back.

"A strange woman—she will give you more trouble in the future or I am mistaken. May I ask what you intend doing—have you formed any plans yet?"

"Oh, yes. As soon as I heard your news last night I knew but one course remained for me."

"And that?"

"To go from here to Denver, and, if necessary, to New York or Virginia. You have some idea of what my grandfather's death means to me, but you don't know all. It's a weird story, and if our lives run together for a time——"

"They will, if I have anything to say about it," declares our Bob, vehemently, at which Gypsy smiles as though he amuses, yet pleases her.

"I mean to take you further into my confidence, for I realize that it was no common accident that put you in the way of being Rudolph Gordon's trusted messenger. He once wrote me that some time he would send some one to me whom I was to treat with great consideration."

"Ha! is that what you meant when I first met you and said I had come all the way from New York to see Estelle Gordon?"

"What did I remark?" she asks, turning her face away.

"I wonder if you are that man."

She laughs.

"How pat you have it, Mr. Bob."

"It sank into my brain, and I have thought of it many times. Did you mean that?"

"Yes, but you forget—you presume to take the part of the confessor. I will answer no more questions at present. In three hours we will leave Hawk's Nest for Denver."

She speaks as composedly as though this were but a trifling event. System has reduced things to such a fine point that her people know exactly what is expected of them.

They go about their work, and by the hour she has specified the party are able to leave. A faithful overseer remains, in whose charge Hawk's Nest rests securely.

To the Virginian and Monsieur Merle this sudden flitting is pretty much of a mystery. Perhaps they guess something of the truth with regard to the strange absence of Miss Gordon, for few questions are asked. It may also suit their plans to get in the radius of civilization again.

So the little cavalcade gallop along, five men and one charming, bright girl who can outride any of them. The servant accompanies them to return with the horses. In the rear is a wagon bearing trunks

and Gypsy's maid, a sedate creature, devoted to the interests of her eccentric mistress.

And after one stop at a country town over nght, they reach the city of Denver the second afternoon.

BOOK TWO.

In the Whirl at Denver.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WHO WORE THE WHITE PRIMROSE.

Two nights later Bob Pemberton might be noticed wandering about in the rotunda of one of Denver's best hotels, his manner uneasy as though he has fresh trouble on his mind. It is the same Bob whom we saw coolly light a weed while the gray tiger cat was crouching for a spring, at the time he was lost in the woods, though one might hardly guess his identity, since the outlandish garb of a mighty Nimrod has been exchanged for the clothes of daily life.

Now and then he glances up at the hotel clock with a frown, as though he suspects that it must have stopped altogether, or else an extra weight is attached to the pendulum. Surely the minutes were never so long. His impatience is suspicious—it means one of two things—either Bob has an appointment

with the girl he loves, or some one whom he longs to thrash.

A bell rings out on some neighboring tower, and the sound electrifies him.

"There, I knew the miserable old clock was a bundle of deceit. It's time now."

He looks around him sharply, as though he expects to see some one near by, looks eagerly, and upon meeting with disappointment, frowns.

"Not yet—but he will come—I believe it. I wonder how this will stand the racket."

He bends his rattan cane across his knee—it is a fairly stout stick, and capable of enduring considerable hard work. Satisfied with its action, Pemberton begins to pull at his mustache again, and thus betrays his nervousness.

"What a strange freak of fate that I, of all men, should pick up that note in the hall this P. M. Let's see just what it says—what a fool Guy Livingstone must be to imagine that because Gypsy Gordon is lively, vivacious, even daring in her way, she would accept such an appointment as he makes. Strange that she did not confide in me, but she keeps her own counsel. Ah! here it is."

He opens the crumpled sheet and reads to himself the extraordinary contents, all the while frowning like a pirate.

"DEAR MISS GORDON:—Believing that you might like to see the sights of Denver by night, I offer my services as a guide. If you accept, you can depend upon the honor of a gentleman to protect you. I will

be in the rotunda at eight sharp. I will wear a white primrose in my lapel. Your cousin, GUY."

Bob gives this note a savage shake.

"There's a delicious morsel—whoever heard of a man making such a blooming idiot of himself. I'd like to have his neck just where that paper is, the scoundrel. Very good—very good. If he were my own brother, or—Senator John, I'd teach him to go around insulting young girls who chance to be alone in the world. Ha! here's a line, a postscript I hadn't noticed before. What does it say—'come vailed!' Hang the fellow's impertinence, he seems to be quite confident that Gypsy will be on hand."

With this energetic remark, Pemberton begins to cast about him for the party who wrote the note which Gypsy must have accidentally dropped, and which fell into his hands in such a Providential way.

He works his hands in a nervous manner, though they itch to lay hold of something which he can twist and manipulate with the spasm of fury that seizes upon him.

When he has roamed about, and covered perhaps two-thirds of the generous space taken up by the rotundas and office of the great western hotel, he suddenly gives a little snort, whether of disgust or delight it would be hard to say.

There are several score of people present, people who represent almost every State in the Union, and not a few foreigners, too, who are doing the West, and must, of necessity, take in the wonderful city of Colorado, the young giant that has rushed in the

race until she is fast leaving all competitors in the lurch.

Thus, quite a heterogeneous company is assembled, and under other circumstances Bob would be interested in watching the crowd, as he is fond of such things. Just now he is wholly engrossed with his search for the distinguishing mark of the white primrose.

And he finds it.

That start betrays the fact, and he stands there gritting his teeth, his eyes fastened upon Guy Livingstone, the Virginian, who moves about, his gaze ever and anon turned upon the grand staircase as though expecting some one to descend that way—pinned to the left lapel of his Prince Albert coat of gray cloth is a single flower—the white primrose.

"Who could believe a gentleman would descend to such a depth, as to treat his own cousin in this way. It shows he has a poor appreciation of her, confound him. He takes her odd ways, her frank manner, her unconventional, unaffected style of doing things as a lack of knowledge concerning what the world calls propriety. The fool! I would have given some thing to have seen the little lady after she read that letter. I can imagine her fine show of temper—not that I blame her a particle—I can almost see her walking up and down her room, with that quick, graceful step, her pretty face, usually so roguish, marked with a frown. Good Heavens! I must stop this monologue or I shall get excited myself, and at this moment I desire to be particularly cool and collected.

"See how the fellow struts around, and he a Vir-

ginian, and she his cousin, too. Now, let me consider the matter and lay out a plan of action. I shall wait a few minutes, yet, just to tantalize this fellow—kind of get him worked up, you know. Then I'll descend upon him after the manner of the Alpine avalanche Senator John tells about. I'll confront him with the proofs of his villainy, and perhaps slap his face, inviting him to challenge me. On the field of honor I believe I can give a good account of myself. Should it come to a battle royal on the spot, these fellows will see some fun. At any rate, I'm determined to give him a lesson."

Thus grumbling, the man from New York keeps his eyes fastened upon the other, and endeavoring to preserve his calmness even while he watches Livingstone grow more excited.

At length his eagerness to be at the man reaches a point which will no longer be controlled.

He draws in a big breath as though preparing himself for the conflict.

"Now!" he says, takes two steps forward, and comes to a sudden halt.

"Jupiter! I didn't take her into consideration," for his eyes have fallen upon a figure descending the broad stairs, a figure that is cloaked and vailed, and yet which Bob Pemberton instantly recognizes as Gypsy Gordon herself, for there is that in her walk to distinguish her above all others.

He feels a cold sensation creep over him—it is as if his flesh had, somehow, come in contact with ice.

What does her coming portend? He cannot believe that Gypsy would accept this bold invitation of her

cousin. She is daring, but there is nothing brazen about her.

And yet what is he to think of her appearance here? She is cloaked, and wears the vail suggested in that letter of invitation?

Bob inwardly groans.

His faith in womankind will receive a severe shock if he is compelled to see Gypsy, in whom he already feels a deep interest, going off on such a questionable errand with this cavalier.

Wait!

Somehow he has a feeling that this is not yet the end—that Gypsy may yet surprise not only himself but her cousin. He has a deep and abiding faith in her truth, in her womanly honor, and cannot believe she will disappoint him so.

He stands there, watching, and mentally praying that Gypsy may be held back from doing that which will lower her in his eyes. And while he watches she reaches the foot of the stairs.

Here she stops, but it is only to look around her and discover where the party may be who wears the white primrose.

So Bob watches, his heart in his eyes. He sees some one moving toward her—of course it is the Virginian cousin who has judged her according to his standard of feminine graces, and has dared to send such a bold letter.

His face—Bob grinds his teeth as he sees it, for the eager look of anticipation there reminds him of the fowler who sees game actually entering his snare—it is smiling, bland, and apparently conscious of

power, as the countenance of a handsome man is very apt to be.

He pushes his way straight through the crowd, his eyes being riveted upon the trim little figure at the foot of the stairs, who awaits his coming with something of nervousness, for Bob can see a small foot tapping upon the floor.

Perhaps if Mr. Guy Livingstone could have a vague idea of what is in store for him, his haste would be somewhat toned down. Unfortunately for him, this knowledge is not in his power.

Now he reaches the lower landing of the stairs, elevated nearly a foot from the floor. It is upon this the girl stands and waits the coming of her cavalier, waits for him as might one who expects a lover, and, apparently, sees nothing of the other who watches from a point near by, a look of pain on his face, his whole soul in his eyes.

Livingstone raises his hat, but in an off-hand manner that Bob cannot but notice. He fails to show the deep respect due a lady. This is one of the first results of that accursed note—her acceptance of his invitation to look upon the gay sights of Denver after dark, has already lowered Gypsy in the Virginian's mind.

So Bob grates his teeth and makes a motion with his hands as though wringing the neck of an obstreperous fowl. Beyond such pantomime gestures he can do nothing—the power to avenge the insult offered Gypsy Gordon has been taken from his hands by the appearance of that young woman on the scene—if she sees fit to accept the invitation of her cousin, and

trusts to his honor, why, there has been no insult given, and a certain individual who goes by the name of Bob Pemberton had better keep his fingers out of the fire.

He shrugs his shoulders and begins to wonder where he had better go to spend the evening and forget all about Gypsy and her fortunes—he even starts to running over in his mind the various places of amusement that offer an evening's entertainment when he notices that a change has taken place in the situation.

For a minute the Virginian and his cousin appear to be engaged in earnest conversation—she does most of the talking while Guy shrugs his shoulders, makes eloquent gestures, with his white hands, and upon his face can be seen an expression such as a gambler might exhibit when he finds the game almost in his hands.

Then the scene suddenly changes. Bob can hardly see how it is done, but discovers Livingstone's hand upraised as though to ward something off, while over his face has come a look of actual alarm.

"Jove! she means to give him the same lesson Rollins and Peterman received," Bob exclaims, for he has seen enough to bring that other event vividly before his mind.

Gypsy Gordon again proves that she knows how to defend herself—that she is a girl among a thousand.

Yes, she has drawn from under her cloak the individual whip which beat such a lively tattoo upon the shoulders of the two men who attempted arson at Hawk's Nest.

Bob holds his breath, but in his mind comes the thought that the man who is fated to soon make the acquaintance of this toy whip is to be pitied.

The lash descends with stinging emphasis—it twists about the Virginian's proud neck, it cuts across his handsome face, leaving a livid welt. While it does not whistle through the air, it seems to fall with emphasis. Truly, Miss Gordon has some muscular force in that nervy little arm of hers, and when the fires rage within it shows how dangerous any man may find it to offer her an insult.

Bob pushes closer, not knowing what the amazed Virginian may do when he recovers from his stupor; the sting of his chastisement may cause Guy Livinsgtone to forget that it comes from the hand of a girl.

Of course, such a scene as this, happening in the first hotel of Denver, creates intense excitement.

It all occurs in a minute of time, but the attention of almost every soul in the place is immediately drawn to the spot.

As is usual in such cases, the sympathy of the crowd is with the girl. Perhaps this is because her vail has been flung back so that she may see where to lay her lashes, and the masculine eyes are able to scan her beauty. There is, however, another cause. In an affair of this kind men incline to take the part of the woman because she is the weaker vessel, and no woman would be using a whip upon a dashing Lothario unless she had wrongs to avenge.

So, while voices are raised and even shouts can be heard, they are all in her favor.

At any rate, they serve notice on the man who feels the lash that those present are mostly Americans, and that, loving fair play, they will use him roughly if he dares turn upon the woman who is at the other end of that whip.

Livingstone receives a number of strokes ere he can collect his thoughts. Escape is the only solution to the problem. He might and probably would scorn to turn his back on a man, for he has the reputation of a fire-eater in his own State, but the case is entirely different when his opponent is a young and pretty woman.

The best thing he can do is to try and lose his identity in the crowd as speedily as possible, and thus escape recognition.

Quick as thought he wheels and, bending his head, makes a frantic rush for what he imagines is another room at the other end of the stairs.

Almost immediately there is heard the sound of a tremendous collision, and the falling of shattered glass, for the wretched Virginian, in his mad haste to escape, has plunged headlong into a large mirror and actually shivered it with his head.

As he staggers back, utterly bewildered, an attache of the hotel rushes up and leads the unfortunate man into a side room, where he can collect his scattered senses and settle the bill for damages.

When Bob turns from watching the undignified retreat of the baffled Guy he has a fleeting glimpse of Gypsy's figure running up stairs.

CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR MERLE, THE WIZARD.

It has all passed so quickly that some of the men present have hardly been able to learn what the excitement is about before Gypsy vanishes up the stairs and Livingstone is led, dazed and subdued, into a side room, after his unlucky Quixotic encounter with the mirror.

The murmur of voices arising proclaims what an intense interest these pilgrims at the Denver caravansary take in the matter.

As for Bob, that worthy chuckles as though he believes it the best joke of the season. He has felt very vindictive toward the Virginian, but what he has just seen tells him that Guy Livingstone has received a terrible lesson, and Bob is inclined to call it quits.

He figures up on his fingers the multitude of disasters that have come upon that party.

First, the stinging lashing received at the hands of a little woman who can defend herself, and this, in iteslf, is enough to demoralize even a bolder man than the Virginia beau.

Second, the catastrophe with the mirror, in which he came out so badly—he will doubtless have a sore head from that battle royal for at least a day or two.

Then again there are the pecuniary damages due

the hotel proprietors, who being business men are not disposed to look at such matters from a romantic or sympathetic standpoint, so that he will have a neat bill to settle.

Last of all, and most difficult of accomplishment, is the task of keeping his name out of the papers. The incident is bound to be given a prominent notice, and Guy will be lucky indeed if he can, by a liberal use of cold cash, suppress names.

So Bob washes his hands of the affair, though he can never forget it. His admiration for the young girl is on the increase, and from time to time he gently claps his hands and mutters, "bravo" as, in imagination, he can see her resolutely reminding Cousin Guy that it is not always safe to believe that because a girl is lively by nature and quite unprotected, she can be insulted with impunity.

Some one pulls at his sleeve, and turning he discovers Monsieur Merle, his wrinkled face wreathed in a smile, and his sage little head nodding after his peculiar style.

"It was grand—magnificent!" he says, with an attitude of intense admiration.

"Ah! you saw the little performance, then?" says Bob, with a grin.

"I take it all in. I know zat Mr. Guy, and I believe he got his deserts for once. Ah! not for worlds would I this hour exchange places with him," gabbles the French lawyer.

"You don't know what it was all about?" for Bob has even suspected that these two are in league against Gypsy Gordon.

"I do not know, but I can give one good guess, knowing zat Mr. Livingstone pride himself on being a man of ze worl'—as I might say. He seek her money—when he finds zat others are ahead of him in zat game he change his cards and play for something else. I am delighted to know he got—what you call 'em—left."

Although the lawyer rubs his hands together and gives all the evidences of being greatly tickled, Bob does not trust him too far.

He has had some experience with this class of the *genus homo* before, and cannot say that he admires the breed.

"Can I do anything for you, Monsieur Merle?" for something in the lawyer's manner tells him this meeting is not a chance one.

"It is true—you can do me one favor, if you are so disposed."

"Mention it," coldy, which does not argue well for the success of the Frenchman's quest.

"Pardon me, are you one bachelor?"

"Yes."

"Without ze entangling alliance, ze promise to love and cherish?" eagerly.

Somewhat puzzled, Bob replies:

"If I catch your meaning, you want to know if I am engaged—is that it?"

"Ah! you have hit it ze first pop, and what do I hear you reply?"

"I am quite free."

"What are ze inclinations—do you ever expect to take ze charming wife—to change from better to

worse—confusion, I mean to enter ze realms of bliss?'' stammers the Frenchman.

''It may be when the right one comes along I will try to win her,'' returns Bob, slowly.

''Monsieur, tell me, I beg, has not ze right one come—it is not idle curiosity zat prompts me to question—I have ze good of your heart at stake?''

Bob moves uneasily as he thinks that, after all, there may be more about this matter than appears on the surface.

He looks Monsieur Merle in the eye.

''What is the use of beating around the bush—you refer to Miss Gordon?'' he says.

The other places his hand over the region of his flinty old heart, bows and smiles.

''Ze captivating Mees Gordon, who can ride a wild horse, shoot ze deer of ze forest, break hearts and, begar! use her riding whip wiz a vengeance. Yes, zat is ze lady I have refer to.''

''Well, I don't understand how you came to pry into my affairs——''

''You will bless me for it.''

''But there's nothing I'm ashamed of in the business——''

''No, no; certain not.''

''So I don't mind telling you, in confidence, you understand, that I greatly admire the young lady, and if I remain of the same mind, hope to win her consent, some day, to be my wife.''

''Some day—zat is a long way off—why not now, Monsieur Pemberton?''

The eagerness which, in spite of habitual caution,

shows itself upon the face of the French lawyer, arouses Bob's suspicion instantly.

He knows, full well, that men of Monsieur Merle's calibre do not go around seeking to do good, without a deep purpose underlying it.

Hence, while placed upon his guard, he does not betray his thoughts, though keeping his eyes open to the facts.

"Oh!" he says, with a light laugh, offering the lawyer a cigar, "she would not have me—she does not know me well enough."

"Try and see. Zere are some points in connection wiz zis matter of which I know better zan any one else. Try and see, Mr. Pemberton, I give you my solemn word, I have reason to believe she will marry you by to-morrow night."

Bob, in the act of striking a match, turns his head and looks at the other. He is startled by the words, pleased in one sense, and yet deeply mystified.

"That would be the acme of happiness, but I am afraid you are over sanguine. Be my wife by to-morrow night. Great guns! you take my breath away, man."

Then Bob proceeds to rasp the match over the sole of his shoe, and apply the flame to his weed. He does not appear to be greatly disturbed over the prospect of so soon being a Benedict—perhaps this is, in part, caused by the fact that he suspects the other of a deep motive, and has applied himself to learning what it is.

"It would suit you, sar?"

"Well, it's a consummation devoutly to be wished; but I have grave fears," shaking his head.

The other rubs his hands in a miser-like way and chuckles.

"Begar! it shall come to pass! I have ze lever zat will influence Mees Gordon. All you must do is to pop ze question and propose to give her a protector by to-morrow night, I will do the rest."

"Why particularly then?"

Does Monsieur Merle turn a little red—if so his confusion is immediately gone.

"It must be—I was ze confidential adviser of her grandfather—zere are reasons why Mees Estelle should be married. I will tell 'em to her. All you have to do is to propose—Monsieur Merle paves ze way."

"But you don't care a picayune for me—then why this sudden interest?"

The lawyer studies a minute and sees light.

"I will tell you. Ze young lady is bound to get married, and I would like to continue ze management of ze legal business. You will promise me zis if I secure your happiness."

It is well put.

"I could not do less," declares Bob, frankly, though to himself he is saying: "Now, what under the sun is this old heathen up to—some deep game, I'd swear. To discover it I must match cunning against cunning, and pretend to be mere putty in his hands."

"You promise zen, zat if you become the husband of Mees Gordon inside of a week, you will

leave ze legal affairs of ze estate with ze old firm of attorneys I represent?"

"Yes, I give you my word."

"Shake hands—you are one gentleman. Rest your mind easy, you will be a happy Benedict before many hours roll around."

"Ah! Aladdin and his wonderful lamp outdone. What a pity you can't assist all wretched lovers—a touch of the magic wand and it is done—presto!"

Even the French lawyer has to smile at his words, though, at the same time, he shakes his head.

"Ah! ze magic power it do not extend beyond zis particular young woman. Zat is where you are in luck, my dear boy."

"True, true, and what do you advise?"

"Zat you pop ze question to Mees Gordon."

"When?"

"Let me see—at ten in ze morning."

"Good, I like promptness, and you guarantee that she will say yes?"

"I am so sure of it as can be. I would stake much on her acquiescence. Remember, I shall compel you to make me ze promise."

"Eh?"

"To zis effect—zat you sall be marry to-morrow night, if she agrees."

"Bless you, Monsieur Merle, I will only be too happy. I promise to propose this to the lady—to insist upon it, in fact. What more can I do—what more would you ask?"

"It is then accomplished. I give my word—I know my power. We will dance at ze wedding. When it is

over you sall be taken into my confidence and learn ze great secret."

"Oh! I'm not so particular—such bliss ought to satisfy me. It isn't the means, so much as the end that I seek, though, of course, they must be honorable."

"Bah! is zere anything wrong here—you ask ze lady to marry you—she accept. You press an early hour and say zere are business reasons; begar, she hold back a leetle, you persist, and she finally consent, my best of friend."

Dhough to himself Bob is saying:

"Married in twenty -four hours—it takes my breath away and this sly rascal has a deep, a very deep and dark game about him which I must learn the nature of before it is too late. I shall be a proud man to have Gypsy for my own, but if by such an act I bring trouble upon her head, I should never forgive myself. Wherefore, Bob Pemberton, it behooves you to go slow and learn what the 'motif' back of this may be."

"And remember, I am to be ze legal representative of ze firm after ze consolidation—zat is to be my pay," comes in the peculiar voice of the lawyer.

"Certainly."

"Zere will be no such scenes as we have just witnessed. Mees Gordon will have a protector who can stand up for her."

"I was just about to sail into him when she appeared on the scene."

"Indeed—from zat I infer zat you know he have made what you call an appointment wif her?"

"Yes, I knew it; picked up a note he sent her; watched for the man wearing the white primrose. But enough—Gypsy punished the fellow for his impertinence, and I believe he will never attempt to harm her openly. Pardon me, I have an appointment."

"Remember, at ten."

"I will be on deck, Monsieur Merle. *Bon soir!*"

Gravely they shake hands, these two who have just completed one of the oddest compacts ever made, and then separate.

Bob Pemberton's appointment must be one of the mind, or else it can await his convenience, for three minutes later he is engaged in the odd—for him—task of keeping an eye on the man who claims to exercise such magical power over Miss Gypsy.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE DOCTOR KNEW.

Bob has entirely lost his air of repose—he is thoroughly awake and in deep earnest. The matter has gone beyond play, and become business.

"That man has a selfish object in this affair, and I must discover what it is. He says he knows certain facts that will induce Gypsy to consent to a speedy marriage—perhaps some clause of the will reads that she loses her share of the estate in case she is not married before reaching a certain age."

He ponders over this.

"Jove! I'd rather believe it to be the other way, and that she sacrifices all if she marries before a certain date. That time is very close, or else old Merle wouldn't be so anxious. And if this occurs he is sure of a big plum from some person who benefits by the performance."

Thus Bob, by mere luck, has hit a streak of guessing that promises rich returns. He keeps an eye on the Frenchman, desirous of learning more about his movements, for it may be even possible to discover the source of secret power, the hidden lever with which he expects to accomplish such wonderful results.

Monsieur Merle wanders around for a little while. He appears restless, and yet bubbling over with excitement. Now and then, when he thinks no one is

looking, he figuratively shakes hands with himself, as though thus offering self congratulations for the success that has come to his cause.

Three separate times he wanders into the barroom of the hotel, and treats himself to bitters, coming out, on the third occasion, with an air that is rather hilarious.

Bob wishes he would do something or other in the line of business. Perhaps this priming is necessary, in order to reduce himself to a state fit for the emergency.

Ah! now he walks off, with a pompous strut, as might a little Napoleon. Outside he takes one of the waiting carriages, and is whirled through the streets of Denver. Behind comes a second vehicle, from the window of which the head of one Bob Pemberton is occasionally thrust, as he marks the stage of the pursuit, and gives words of cheer or warning to his driver.

Thus he is not far away when the Frenchman enters a certain house. He examines this place.

"A restaurant, I take it. Strange that he should come here after leaving the hotel. He has an object —ah, yes, this is a rendezvous."

Then he studies the position.

"Shall I enter—there is risk in it—I don't half like the looks of the place, but how much may be gained by it."

He has left his vehicle at the corner, the man agreeing to wait for him, on account of the double fee to be received. So Bob scouts around a bit.

"Reminds me of college days, when we used to

spy upon the secret society men," he chuckles, entering into the fun of the game.

By peeping in through the glass door he sees the nature of the place. It is an oyster house and restaurant. Tables are placed in odd corners and niches. Bob never saw such a queer place.

Just as he looks in he sees Monsieur Merle, arm in arm with some one else go into one of these retreats, presumably to sit down and chat while they pretend to master a stew.

Bob recognizes his chance, and entering drops into the next niche, orders something and sets to work, using his ears to the best advantage.

He hears but a modicum of the conversation—indeed, can only make out that the men are discussing Miss Gordon's affairs. Once he hears his own name uttered by the Frenchman, accompanied by a sneering laugh, but the man from New York mutters, under his breath:

"He laughs best who laughs last, monsieur."

Plainly he is not disturbed by the situation, but ready to grasp it.

One other point he makes—it is an address, an important address he understands, from the manner in which it is given. Bob jots it down, and determines to see this party before he retires.

At length the two men arise.

"Colonel, I can depend on you?" says monsieur.

"To the death. I'm in this business heart and soul —you know why. Carry out your plan, and the game is ours," returns the other.

"Is it?" mutters Bob, who hides his face as they

pass, for recognition would be a sad thing just now, when he leads the French lawyer a chase.

Who is the colonel, and what business has he meddling with the affairs of Gypsy Gordon? What was it —Colonel Corneel, the Frenchman called him. I'll remember the name—perhaps Gypsy may recognize it—who knows?

He passes out of the restaurant just in time to see them drive away in the vehicle that brought the French lawyer to the rendezvous. Bob gives chase again, and sees the colonel landed at an obscure hotel in the old part of the city.

Monsieur Merle drops out of sight and Bob finds he has plenty of leisure time to look up the party whom he desires to see.

Five minutes after nine he rings the bell of a sober-looking house. A servant answers the summons.

"Is Doctor Hammond at home?"

"Yes, sah."

"Can I see him?"

"Walk into de consultation room, sah."

So, with little ceremony, Bob is ushered into the presence of a man who is destined to have something to do with his fortunes. He is a pretty good reader of character as stamped upon the human face —the education received in the whirl of Wall street is enough to sharpen man's faculties in this respect at least, and make him more than a professional mind reader.

Bob sees a man with a gray head, a thoughtful man, a student, who believes there are always new

things to be found in his profession and is never too old to learn.

"Good evening, doctor."

"Good evening, sir. How can I serve you?"

"Doctor, I have come here not for medical advice, but seeking information."

"Very good. Kindly proceed," returns the other, showing some surprise and interest.

"In times past you knew one Rudolph Gordon, a strange old Virginia millionaire?"

"I did. For some years, in fact, until I came out to Colorado, I was his family doctor."

"So I supposed. You have heard of his death?"

"No. Has old Rudolph gone? A queer man, and yet most well informed on all subjects. Wonderful mind he had, I assure you. What can I do for you in connection with this matter?"

"Do you know the nature of his will?"

The doctor looked fixedly at Bob.

"I do not feel at liberty to speak," he replies.

"I promise to tell you the story, and you will then see that I am working wholly in the interest of his legatee, Miss Gordon."

"You mean Gypsy; I remember her well, a daring child. I believe she lives in Denver and has fallen heir to a fortune on her mother's side. More than once I've seen items about her in the papers—her beauty, her daring and originality."

"On my part I feel safe in telling you the whole story," which he does immediately.

"Ah!" says the doctor, who has listened with intense interest, "quite a romantic affair, I declare,

This eagerness of the French lawyer to have Miss Gordon marry before the twenty-first is not much of a mystery to me."

"Bravo!" cried Bob, jumping up and shaking hands with the medical man.

"Providing the will stands that I signed as a witness some years ago, and which Rudolph insisted on reading out to me clause after clause."

"Tell me its provisions."

"It left all his property to his beloved grandchild, Estelle—you who have seen the old man can enjoy the sarcasm of that phrase, 'beloved grandchild.' There was a severe condition. If she married under eighteen she would forfeit all."

Bob smiles broadly.

"The animus is plain enough now. Her birthday falls on the twenty-first."

"It is true. I was present at her birth in Old Virginia eighteen years ago. Her mother died in less than two weeks, a sweet lady, too, and Lee Gordon, her father, was killed in the hunting field not three years later. Let me see, I have a diary of those years —I will ascertain what it says."

He goes to a bookcase, and picking out one of a number of little volumes, sits down again, turning over the leaves.

"Here we have the entry in black and white. October twenty-one, stormy day—attended the wife of Lee Gordon, who gave her husband a fine little girl. Lee very much disappointed, as he wished for a boy to keep up the name. Child delivered as per my register at eleven fifty-five."

Bob slaps his hand on his knee as a brilliant thought flashes into his mind.

"Jove! I see a chance to overreach this cunning legal gentleman, at the same time taking advantage of his scheming."

"Let's hear it, my boy," says the doctor.

"Suppose he should carry his idea out and influence Gypsy to accept me, to even marry me to-morrow night, and I should manage it that the ceremony came off, would she not be over eighteen years of age?"

"Most certainly," declares the doctor, emphatically, "and I congratulate you on such a bright thought. If you can accomplish that, all is well."

"Can you give me any idea as to the manner in which this legal shark may influence Gypsy, so as to agree to a marriage. She is so independent, it could hardly be the fear of losing her grandfather's estate, even if he entered that plea, and made out that the will reads just the opposite from what it does, in truth."

"I cannot even guess, but he has some scheme. Perhaps he will make use of you—declare that you threaten suicide unless she consents."

"I trust he will not make me out such a fool as that," exclaims Bob, aghast.

"He will probably have even a better plea—trust a shrewd lawyer for that. However, I see nothing better for you to do than to go along with the landslide, but be sure the affair occurs, if it does come off, on the twenty-first or later."

"I can depend upon you, doctor?"

"I will stand by my register, if that is what you mean."

"A thousand thanks, doctor. Perhaps you might clear up another mystery. What is the lawyer's motive—who will benefit by Miss Gordon's forfeiture of her grandfather's estate?"

"It goes to the next of kin—the nephew of Rudolph."

"Who is he?"

"Cornelius Gordon."

"Ah! I see, no—Colonel Corneel. The 'motif' is supplied. All is clear sailing, and I think we ought to be able to defeat the conspirators."

"Oh! you could do that by informing Miss Gordon of the truth," suggested the physician, slyly.

Bob looks downcast and grave.

"Well, you see, if I am to propose, I don't know why I shouldn't carry out the whole thing to the letter. I'm only too willing, and if this Merle has arranged it so that Gypsy is ready to take me off-hand, it would be cruel to disappoint him. No, I'll let matters take their course, and only make sure that it is not before the twenty-first."

"Well, good luck to you. I like your looks, and wish you success. Good-night."

So Bob has made great progress in the game.

CHAPTER XII.

NOW IT IS BOB, THE MAGICIAN.

Delighted with his evening's work, Pemberton returns once more to his hotel. He believes fortune is playing the game into his hands, and rests on his oars to allow the lawyer a chance to get in his work.

Of course he labors under a certain amount of excitement, which is natural enough. Affairs are advancing with great strides, in connection with his fortunes.

The night passes, and upon the city of Denver dawns the twenty-first of October. It will be a day long to be remembered by certain parties connected with our story, a day to be marked with a white stone in their calendar.

Bob is early astir—indeed, his rest has been very poor indeed, with this weight on his mind. He takes a walk before breakfast to settle his nerves. This man who has stood coolly among the howling cohorts of Wall street, amid the craze of a money panic, who has seen a fortune melt away before his eyes, and even laughed while it went, trembles to remember that on this day he must pass though a new ordeal—face the battery of woman's eyes and either meet defeat or carry the fort.

"Brace up, old chap—such a thing generally comes but once in a lifetime. It's like the measles, I reckon.

Besides, if you only knew it, my boy, you're lucky to have matters smoothed over, so that all you probably have to do is to go in and win. Nine o'clock—another hour. Hello! thought I'd overlooked something—my breakfast. That will consume half of the time or more. First occasion on record for me."

He is just coming out of the dining-room at a quarter to ten, when he sees the French lawyer entering. Monsieur Merle grins and holds out his hand in the peculiar style he has.

"I congratulate you, my dear Pemberton," he says.

"Eh? You don't mean——"

"She loves you."

"I would rather get that from first hands," and Bob frowns at the thought of such a queer matchmaking.

"Pardon, monsieur, but the case is so strange you see. I have to discover zat so I have some foundation to work upon."

"Look here, you haven't worked upon her sympathy—given her to understand that I would commit suicide unless she consented to a speedy marriage?"

The Frenchman raises his hands in mock surprise.

"Nevaire. I have simply told ze charming mees zat you loved her to distraction, and would be zere to say it in person at ten sharp."

"Good—nine minutes left yet—proceed."

"Zen I tell her certain facts connected with ze history of her house, and which I need not repeat here, zat influence her greatly. At length she say:

'If he begs very hard I don't see how I can refuse.' Ah! my dear boy, be sure you plead well."

"Won't I—well, if the case is lost it can't be laid at my door, for I'm in dead earnest, and she was inclined to be merciful—to give in?"

"I tell you she loves ze man zat carry her out of ze burning woods. It was one great streak of luck zat give you ze chance of your life. You see when destiny takes a hand in ze game zere is no use for any poor mortal plotter like zat Livingstone to come in. I feel sorry for zat man—he must be in a state fit for murder. But you seem so cool—so self-possessed—you who should be burning up with ze lover's ardor. I do not comprehend."

"Oh! there's a good five minutes yet. Time enough when I face those eyes."

The French lawyer evidently does not mean to allow anything to interfere with Bob being on time. He has an interest at stake.

As the young man saunters out of the dining-room he steps up to his own apartment to brush his hair, it may be to compose his nerves for the peculiar ordeal before him.

Promptly at ten o'clock Bob presents himself at the door of the private parlor which is a part of the elegant suite of rooms Miss Gordon occupies. He has been here before, and knows the place well.

He knocks boldly—if it has been arranged that he should play the part of a lover, there is no reason why he should not do it with his whole heart.

"Come in."

Is that Gypsy's voice, so full of fear and trembling.

Bob has a little spasm of remorse—can it be that rascally old lawyer has scared her in some way?

He opens the door and enters.

Gypsy is seated in a comfortable chair—she is attired in a bewitching house gown, and Bob is immediately convinced that she never before looked one-half so charming.

True, a blush suffuses her face, but back of it he sees the same arch look that so captivated him on the occasion of their first meeting.

At her feet his astonished eyes beheld a cushion, and it strikes him, all in a heap, that, knowing the nature of his mission, she has prepared for his coming. So he is expected to drop his knee on that and sue for her hand. Perhaps Bob may adopt other methods—he has been known as an original fellow.

"You look rather downcast, Mr. Pemberton. The morning is bracing—I hope you are not sick?" she says, with affected sympathy.

"Never felt better in my life."

"Perhaps you have heard bad news from home."

"Have no home—poor orphan."

"Business troubles?"

"There, you have struck it, Miss Gypsy. I am worrying over the details of a new business. I am thinking of entering upon a sort of partnership affair."

The audacious fellow actually enjoys seeing her cheeks suddenly flush crimson at his significant words; but she keeps her self-possession.

"It is too bad you have cause for such worry. You are bold by nature; why don't you untie the

Gordan knot as Alexander did, with one stroke of your sword."

"That is why I am here—to ask your assistance."

"Can such an insignificant creature as I am be of any assistance to a man in distresss over his business?"

"Yes—you can decide the partnership matter."

"I—oh, Mr. Bob."

"You remember our strange meeting and how much I owe you for saving me an encounter with that ugly old panther."

"Stop! you repaid that obligation, ten times over, when you carried me out of the blazing forest. I will not hear you speak of being in debt to me."

"Very good. Now, about this partnership business —will you promise to help me all you can?"

"Willingly."

"It may tax your good nature."

"Oh! I think I can stand it," turning her face away.

Bob sees his opportunity—in an instant he is beside the little beauty—he speaks quietly, yet with an eagerness in his voice that thrills the girl.

"Gypsy, the success of my business venture depends upon you—I want you for my partner. Words are weak to express my meaning. I love you—have loved you with all my heart and soul from the moment I first set eyes on you in the wilderness. The danger we shared together made us better acquainted than years would have done in the ordinary manner.

"I have believed that this deep passion in my heart has aroused a responsive chord in yours. If I am

wrong, send me about my business, but at any rate relieve my anxiety at once."

He goes right to the point like the brave man that he is. Although the temperature of the room is cool and pleasant, Bob is in a feverish state, and, taking out a handkerchief, wipes his forehead.

The girl looks at him rather roguishly.

"Are you sure you are free, Mr. Pemberton?"

"Positive."

"To how many other girls have you said the same thing?"

He ponders.

"Not more than seven, I am dead certain"—then, as she throws up her hands in horror he adds, with a quizzical smile—"and they were in my younger days, when I was about half way between boy and man. Seriously, Gypsy, I have, since reaching man's estate, never breathed a single word of love in the ears of a maiden—I have been wrapped up in my business. It is a serious affair—I feel that the point in my life has come when I must choose for weal or woe. I have selected—it is for you to determine my fate. Will you be my wife, Gypsy?"

Since she expects it, he drops on one knee beside her—she does not turn her face toward him for fear lest he should see how pleased she looks and it might make him conceited, but her little hand creeps out, and he seizes upon it.

"Do you wish it very much, Bob?"

"With all my heart and soul, dear girl."

"Then—I refuse your ofier!"

"What?" gasps Bob.

The little hand is snatched from his grasp with a sudden vim, and at the same moment her face confronts him—she has hard work trying to stiffle the love that exists there, and the frown is pretty much of a failure.

All the same it is enough to alarm poor Bob, and almost send him into a chill.

"I refuse to be a party to a bargain—I believed you to be the soul of honor—I—I confess I care for you too much for my peace of mind, but I will stamp it out," she says, with a fierceness that is assumed to cover up her weakness, for she is on the verge of crying.

"No, no, you must not—you shall not. You have confessed that you love me—by that token I claim you as my own—I will allow nothing to come between—you belong to me," he exclaims, aroused at last.

"But you have not—not—been honorable. You have entered into a conspiracy with Monsieur ——"

"I beg to differ with you—he thinks I have, but I am against him. I will prove it to you. At the same time, as I loved you, I could not resist the temptation to accept the situation, as it seemed to push my suit. I understand he had some reason, some power which he held above your head, and that you would consent to a wedding to-night."

She gives a little gasp.

"Yes, I agreed to that—if you knew all you would not blame me; but I rebelled at last, when I thought you must have conspired with him. Since you say you are not his ally——"

"I am his most deadly foe, if he but knew it."

"Then I might reconsider," she murmurs.

"Ah! you raise my hopes again. You said 'I refuse.' "

"I repeat it—I refuse."

"Gypsy!"

"That makes twice—you know two negatives ——"

"Make an affirmative. You mean yes?"

She nods her head.

"Oh, Bob, please don't," but Bob is not to be balked, and he has her in his arms, this eccentric Miss Gordon, who astonishes and charms nearly all with whom she comes in contact.

Presently he is influenced to be rational, and sit down, but only her promise to share the sofa with him, which she coyly does after smoothing her ruffled plumage before the mirror, influences the ardent lover.

"You promised Monsieur Merle, and I am going to keep you to it," he says.

"Do you really mean it—so sudden—I am in a whirl—I cannot realize that I have promised to give up my independence so soon."

"You shall be just as independent when you are my wife as when single. I have reasons for desiring this step," he says, soberly.

"You wish it, sincerely?"

"I do."

"And you won't think any the worse of me on account of my yielding?"

"I will bless you as long as you live for so freely

giving me the treasure of my life. Tell me you consent, and then I will explain what I have learned of this Frenchman's motives."

She gives him her promise, and Bob—well, having thus made sure of that point before relating why it is not necessary for Gypsy to marry at once, he seals the contract with a kiss.

Then he relates his adventures of the previous evening—how he followed Monsieur Merle and endeavored to overhear his dialogue with the mysterious Colonel Corneel in the chop house, and, later on, his conversation with Doctor Hammond, with regard to Rudolph Gordon's will.

"Oh, Bob!" says Gypsy, looking at him somewhat reproachfully, "then it is not necessary for me to marry to-night—you know this——"

"Yes, but I loved you and was only too glad to accept the sweets the gods had awarded me. You gave me your promise—see, I allow you to take it back—if you wish."

She looks into his eyes—the eager lovelight there charms her—she gives a little sigh of satisfaction and nestles closer to him, murmuring:

"Dear Bob, I am very well content," at which the wretch smiles in consciousness of his power.

CHAPTER XIII.

SENATOR JOHN'S SECRET.

The rest of the day Pemberton spends in making various arrangements. When a man has entered into a compact to marry that very evening it is only natural for him to look around and see that his affairs are in ship-shape condition, at least so far as the hurried nature of the circumstances will admit.

He makes arrangements, finds out when the night train leaves for New York, and engages a stateroom in the sleeper, which is pretty good evidence that he means to leave Denver.

Senator John is taken into the secret, and proves a valuable coadjutor, for it seems that some one is watching Bob, and he imagines the French lawyer, to make sure of him, has put a man on his track.

Several other little things are done calculated to confound the conspirators when they attempt to spring their little trap, and as the day declines Bob rests on his oars, satisfied that he has matters just as he wants them.

Gypsy is in full touch with him, and enters into the spirit of the affair with increasing vim, as though she really enjoyed it all, so that, in the end, Bob congratulates himself on having such a neat arrangement.

So night comes.

Bob meets Monsieur Merle before supper—he expects to, and has Senator John at his side, so that the conversation cannot become very personal. The Frenchman shows impatience—his very look, as he fastens it on Bob, is an interrogation point.

At length he can restrain his feelings no longer, but bursts out with:

"Ze twenty-first day of October was beautiful. If I was about to take to myself a wife zat iz ze time I would select for ze wedding."

"Indeed!" remarks Senator John, looking at Bob.

"What do you think, Pemberton?"

"I have the same idea myself—if ever I marry this is the day I shall select," responds the other, gravely.

"It seems to me that I can even smell ze orange blossoms in ze air—zat some one shall invite us to a leetle ceremony this very night. I am most sure such will be ze case. What sall we say, Monsieur John? We do not want zat to find us unprepared, *parbleu!*"

His humor is irresistible, especially since Bob is feeling very happy on this, his bridal eve.

He bursts into a quiet laugh.

"Merle, you're a sly dog—bound to get an answer out of me, ain't you? Well, I'll tell you the truth—you are invited to a little ceremony."

"When?" snaps the other.

"To-night."

"Zen ze game is won!" exclaims Merle.

"I reckon," replies Bob, dryly, and his words have more meaning than appears on the surface, although the other does not see it.

Senator John, fearing lest questions may follow

that it will put his friend in a hole to answer, changes the conversation in a skilful manner. The lawyer beams like a full-blown rose—he rubs his hands joyously now and then, as though he can hardly restrain his satisfaction. Why not, when he has reason to believe everything is working to suit him?

The meal is finished.

"When and where sall we meet to witness zis charming little affair?" asks the lawyer.

"I have made arrangements with the dominie of the little church around the corner."

"Every city have one. In New York ze actors zey all are married zere."

"The parson will be waiting at half-past eight, in the parlor of the church. We will soon be subjects for congratulation."

"You are one lucky man—you win a beautiful wife—you step into a fortune already made. *Mon Dieu!* I would zat I was born lucky," with a groan, and a shrug; then he clutches Bob's arm and drags his head down until he can whisper in his ear: "Did you have any trouble, *mon ami*—was my part of ze work well done?"

"Excellently," returns Bob.

"And you will never forget me?"

Pemberton turns and looks him in the eye.

"Never, my dear friend, while I live. You have done me a service, whether it was intended as a personal favor or not, and for that I could even forgive many things. This night takes me to the goal I have

longed to reach. Come and rejoice with me, Monsieur Merle."

"Pardon—could I also fetch a friend—one who is, in a measure, interested in the outcome of zis business? I would not intrude, but ze parlor of a church —it is, in a measure, public ground."

Of course Bob knows who this friend is as well as though Monsieur Merle had called him by name—Colonel Corneel is indeed interested in the outcome of the intrigue, though not in the way the Frenchman would infer.

Still, the policy of Bob Pemberton is to keep his own counsel in this respect. He does not wish to open his batteries until the proper time comes, and the enemy has unmasked his fire.

"Bring him along—I may have a friend or two present myself. If he is interested in our little business, well and good," he says, carelessly.

The lawyer smiles and rubs his hands.

"At half-past eight—ah! I will be on hand, my dear boy, to see you enter ze realms of bliss. *Mon Dieu!* you are one exceedingly lucky man," and smiling and nodding he goes to his feed.

Bob eats as well as usual. If he is to be married in a couple of hours that is no reason why he should go hungry. He has always made it a practice to pay attention to these details, and thus his health is good.

A few minor details remain.

Senator John joins him at the table, and gives his report. He has done his duty, and nothing has been neglected, Bob can rest assured. An old traveler

like the Senator, so well versed in railways and their peculiarities, is just the one to manage a business like this, and Bob is well pleased with what he tells.

From the table the two friends repair to their room to finish packing.

They have but a valise apiece, for this visit West was only a hurried business one at best, so their luggage is light enough.

"All aboard!" sings out the Senator, at eight, and then grasps his companion's hand with a look the other cannot fathom.

"Bob, old fellow, you know my sentiments—I'm with you to the end in this affair.

"From hints which you say Miss Gordon has let fall concerning this business, I'm afraid our troubles will not end to-night, even if we do confound this old Frenchman and his backer."

"My dear fellow, I confess I am of the same opinion myself, but nothing can be done—we must await the turn of events. Gypsy's desire to head East immediately is of course influenced by the news I brought her. She will confide this secret to me when she is my wife, and then we will know what we have to meet."

"Yes, and at present it is like fighting in the dark. However, all I meant to say was that you could depend on me always."

"I knew that before you spoke, old boy," warmly.

"And if you will listen for five minutes and forgive me for speaking, let one who once had a dear help meet, but has been a lonely wanderer for many a

year, give you some brotherly advice, at this the last half hour of your bachelor life."

"Five minutes you say—willingly dear John. I am amazed at one thing—I thought you an old bachelor —you never breathed your secret."

A spasm of pain crosses the other's face.

"And only that I love you, Bob, as my own younger brother, I would not speak of it now. It is because I believe the brief recital of my story may profit you and your wife that I unseal my past for this five minutes. Please never allude to it again."

A warm clasp of the hand tells that Bob's heart beats in sympathy with him.

"It was—let me see, nearly twenty years ago. I was then just thirty, well-to-do, successful as a lawyer, fairly good looking, and possessed of a rather quick temper.

"Fate threw me in the way of Ruth—we met in a singular way—I loved her passionately, wooed and won her. I need not tell what a fight I had to get her, for she had another determined suitor, a country squire, who exhausted every means to defeat me, even going so far as to prejudice her father, the dominie, against me.

"But I won at last—she loved me devotedly—an elopement followed—we were married and her father never forgave me for it.

"We were very happy, Bob—a child came to bless us, a dear little thing so like its mother. My business began to worry me some, and I became testy. One day the strain caused me to have hot words with my wife—she was in the right—I suspected it, became

sorry, worried all afternoon, and when I could shake off my business at night hurried home.

"I found a cold house—empty"—he groans at the remembrance—"at first I thought it was her father's work—then I remembered that Ruth had intended going with a neighbor upon some sort of a picnic—it was on a boat. A terrible thing flashed before me. While hurrying home I remembered hearing the newboys shouting an extra—there had been some sort of accident to an excursion boat which had sunk or burned up. Horrified, I rushed out wildly and found a newsboy. The accident was a frightful one—two dozen people had been killed—the boat was burned and not a name mentioned."

Senator John bows his head and there is silence for a moment, during which Bob's hand steals out and grasps that of his friend, to give it a squeeze that comes from the heart.

"I shiver to think of those days I spent trying to find my dear one's remains—those horrible sights have haunted me ever since. When it was found impossible I was taken away by a friend—an attack of brain fever followed our arrival at a country place, but death passed by. I lived to know sorrow—to mourn over the terrible fact that my last words with my dear wife were those of anger, the only time I had ever spoken save in love to her.

"Enough, dear boy—take warning from the years of suffering I have endured—let no cloud come between the one you love and yourself. I have broken the seal of secrecy which has been upon my lips for many years, believing, hoping that I might save you

from the same fate. Come, it is time we started. God bless you and yours, Bob Pemberton. A strange light is before me—I pray it may bring me peace."

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTER MRS. BOB.

Bob is mystified by these words.

They leave the room together, and Bob is more than ever drawn toward this genial friend, who, to serve him, has opened this cruel wound of the past and brought new suffering on himself.

After waiting below a little while, who should appear but Miss Gordon and her maid—the former the cynosure of all eyes, since those in the office know she is the little woman who dared use a riding whip over the shoulders of a man who had in some way insulted her.

"Why, it looks as though you were going for a walk, too," she says, aloud.

"We are—allow us to accompany you," returns Bob, entering into the subterfuge.

So Bob takes Gypsy and leads the way. Only a block or so and they turn a corner coming to a small church. There are lights within. They enter.

The dominie is waiting, and as all legal forms have

been complied with, there is nothing to delay the ceremony. Several parties are present—some members of the officiating minister's family, and a couple of gentlemen who seem to prefer remaining in an obscure corner, though one can easily be recognized by his figure as Monsieur Merle.

Bob looks around a little anxiously and then smiles, for another gentleman has quietly entered the door and makes a motion with his arm that is meant to be reassuring.

"Are you ready, my dear?" Bob asks.

"Yes—let me summon some of the nerve you said I possessed, but I declare it must have been a sham, for I'm shaking all over. Let me have your arm for support—you know I must lean upon you after this. It will soon be over—it only happens once in a lifetime with most people. Bob, don't look so awfully serious—smile—be yourself, or I shall become hysterical," whereupon, in obedience to this request on the part of the one whom he loves so well, the happy groom indulges in a forced grin that hardly becomes him.

Truth to tell, it is a very serious business with Bob—he has always fought shy of weddings, because he sincerely pitied the couple before the altar, they generally appeared to suffer so much.

Besides, he has every reason to believe that circumstances have gathered which will make this a crisis in the affairs of Estelle Gordon. Her interests are now his, and the uncertainty hovering over the whole issue gives him something to worry about.

They advance to the parson, who has a low whis-

pered conversation with the couple desiring his services, after which he glances around, perhaps more from habit than anything else.

"Let it be understood by those who are gathered here to-night that this man, Robert Pemberton, and this woman, Estelle Gordon, have come to me to be united in the holy bonds of matrimony.

"I can find no reason why I should not, by the power invested in me, make them man and wife. If any one present knows of any such impediment let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

Here the usual awful pause occurs.

The dominie looks at each of those present in an inquiring way, but none of them make a sign save the French lawyer, who seems very much concerned lest something in his manner may be construed into a belief that he of all men may attempt to raise a barrier before the couple, for he shakes his head in the negative with a vehemence that threatens to dislocate his neck.

Gypsy's hand tightens on Bob's arm—he moves a little and looks down into her face with what is intended as a reassuring smile.

The minister begins the ceremony, which he makes very short, and presently declares them to be man and wife.

As soon as this has been spoken, Senator John steps forward to congratulate them. He kisses the bride tenderly. Bob has just had time to bend down and snatch a kiss from the lips of his charming little wife, when something occurs to attract the attention

of all, something that is not down on the bills, but which has a close connection with the game.

Monsieur Merle seems to be unduly excited—he and his tall companion are seen to be shaking hands vehemently. They are evidently now in a frame of mind such as results from full confidence of victory.

"It is one grand occasion!" says the lawyer, aloud.

"We've won beyond a doubt," replies his companion, in a bold way.

"*Parbleu!* I do feel like ze grand hurrah—I am bursting to give one shout."

"Gentlemen, what does this mean?" says Senator John, surveying the boisterous pair in affected surprise.

Monsieur and colonel exchange glances.

"Shall we speak, my dear colonel?"

"Why not? I'm secure now—nothing that can be done will change the case. Yes, inform them all why you and I enjoy this hour—tell them of the clause in old Rudolph's last will and testament that makes me his sole heir."

How grandly he says this, as though by the stroke of a pen this adventurer, who has fought hard times for many a year, has suddenly come into a grand fortune.

"Yes, tell it—we are of course amazed, and would be glad to hear the particulars," says Senator John.

Monsieur Merle throws his chest forward and asumes a theatrical attitude.

He is conscious of being the observed of all.

"Zen listen to zis, my friends, my fellow citizens of zis great and glorious country. Rudolph Gordon he makes a will—since zen he die. By zat last will

and testament, which I have ze proud honor to execute myself, he leave everything to his beloved niece, Estelle, on condition that she do not marry until of age—if she take ze husband before zat time she lose all, and it go to zis gentleman, her uncle, Cornelius Gordon."

Gypsy gives a sudden cry, and starts forward as though she would confront the lawyer, but Bob restrains her, whispering:

"Patience, dear—I knew all this—wait and see how we confound the rascals."

Senator John is the spokesman.

"Well?" he says, as Monsieur Merle pauses.

"Ze case is plain—if zis young lady—pardon, madame, I mean Mrs. Pemberton, has wait till tomorrow when she will be eighteen, under ze will of her grandfather she come into all of ze estate—as she have married before coming of age she forfeit everyzing."

The lawyer looked around him as though conscious of having done a great stroke of business while his companion smiles as a man can afford to who has won all.

"Pardon me for interrupting, but it happens that I chance to know something about this matter, seeing that I officiated at the birth of the bride."

The solitary stranger steps forward, and Monsieur Merle looking closely at him, exclaims:

"*Mon Dieu!* it is ze Doctor Hammond."

"Ah! doctor, tell us, if you please, what you know about this case. Perhaps these gentlemen may be glad to receive some information that will tell them

we have not been asleep," remarks Bob's best man, whose turn it is to smile.

"With pleasure, gentlemen. It seems there is a mistake of a day in this business. Even the lady has, all her life, deceived herself—she has labored under the impression that her birthday is the twenty-second of October, when, in truth, the previous day is the time.

"Sacre!" cries the Frenchman.

"Humbug!" exclaims Cornelius.

"Nevertheless, gentlemen, this fact can be proven. The child was born at ten minutes to twelve on the night of the twenty-first, and is so recorded in my official report on file in the proper quarter at Richmond. I do not know how to account for their mistake, except that the father and nurse paid no attention to time for an hour or so afterward, and naturally fell into the error of believing that the child's birthday was the twenty-second."

It is Bob's turn to beam now, and he smiles upon the baffled conspirators as though he believes in the old adage that he laughs loudest who laughs last.

As for Merle and Colonel Corneel, consternation has taken the place of satisfaction—they stand there utterly demoralized, gaping at each other in a stupid manner.

The decided way in which Doctor Hammond has spoken tells them he means every word, and that his decree effectually disposes of their case.

For the time being they are beaten—whether such men will give up the game at once is a question the future must decide.

"Gentlemen, have you any further questions to ask—we cheerfully hold ourselves at your service to answer such," says Senator John.

Monsieur groans and makes a suggestive shrug that speaks volumes—Colonel Corneel looks crushed.

"Merle, have we any more business in this court?" he demands, hoarsely.

"I do not believe."

"Then let's get out."

Turning to Bob, and ignoring Senator John completely, the adventurer says:

"Pemberton, I give you credit for playing a shrewd game. To all appearances you have won, but perhaps I haven't thrown up my hand yet. You will hear from me again, sir."

With which the ex-soldier turns on his heel after a stiff military salute, and strides toward the door of the chapel.

This time it is Bob who endeavors to make a forward movement, and his wife who holds him back—the tables are turned.

"Never mind, dear Bob—let him go. Words are cheap, and, after all, we can afford to let him have that satisfaction. Do you know that you belong to me now, sir?"

Of course Bob is ready to acknowledge his dependence, and in his great happiness feels that what she says with reference to the other is true.

"All aboard for the East!" sings out the Senator, as they issue from the chapel a little later; he endeavors to throw off all the weight that is on his mind and seem cheerful, for Bob's sake.

So they enter a vehicle in waiting near by, and are carried to the station. Denver will soon be left behind, and a new era in their affairs open up.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT OF THE EAST-BOUND EXPRESS.

When the East-bound night express pulls out of Denver, those whose fortunes we have followed are sungly settled in the through sleeper, Bob and his wife have the stateroom and Senator John has secured a berth near by.

He takes a stroll through the train—says it is his usual custom, and yet Bob knows full well he has some particular thought in view. When he comes into the comfortable stateroom a little later, the train is bowling along at a rapid rate, and the night air proves quite chilly.

Senator John smiles to see the tender solicitude with which Bob tucks a heavy traveling shawl around the little form of his wife, but it is a smile of deep satisfaction, for under his breath the Senator is saying:

"Would to Heaven they could always be just as happy as they are now—that no shadow would come between them; but I know that is impossible, for trouble comes sooner or later to all. With such love

in their hearts, they may steer clear of the rocks that shipwreck so many."

Bob, discovering the presence of his old friend, looks closely at him and says:

"Well, what discovery have you made, Senator?"

"I've found out where the silverware is hidden."

"Eh?"

"At least I've run across a couple of spoons."

"Oh, Senator!" exclaims Bob's wife.

"Come, now, no joking. You wouldn't have it otherwise," says that worthy, blushing under his tan.

"Heaven forbid—it is as it should be."

"But you have discovered something else," persists Pemberton.

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh! I'm used to reading faces, you know, and if ever one bore a secret, it's yours."

At this the old traveler laughs.

"You've shot pretty near home. Truth to tell, I have made a discovery—several of 'em—a whole nest, in fact," with an air of mystery.

At this Mrs. Bob sits bold upright.

"They are on board this train."

"Well, that word is rather ambiguous—it covers a great deal of ground, and yet I believe I can really answer yes—they are with us."

"They—all?" cries Bob.

"Let me see—in this car I found a lady—she covered her face with a vail, but was not quick enough to keep it from my eyes, and I recognized one whom I had seen at Hawk's Nest as your aunt."

"Josephine Armitage going East on the same train —it looks cloudy," remarks Gypsy.

"In the car beyond, two confreres are seated, with a table between them, having a friendly little game of euchre. This in the smoking department."

"That must be the bright little Frenchman, Monsieur Merle, and our Uncle Corneel," says Bob, nodding.

"Which concludes the list," from his wife.

"Not quite. There is another sleeper back of us. The berths are nearly made up. As I passed along a head was thrust out, a hand clutched me by the arm, and a voice well remembered said, "Porter—oh! beg pardon—confound the luck!"

Bob laughs heartily.

"Of course that was——"

"My dear Virginia cousin, Guy Livingstone," his wife puts in, sweetly.

"Bless my scul, this train must be made up of Gordons for Gordonville. Are there any more of our friends, the enemy, on board, Senator John?"

"I believe that completes the list, though perhaps I might add to it. There was a fellow in the day smoker put me in mind of the fellow Miss—I mean Mrs. Bob punished so thoroughly at the lodge in that vast wilderness—one Ralph——"

"Oh, come, now, Senator, you're stretching it a point too far. I beg a halt. You've already given us a list that might demoralize most people. Evidently, there is little of accident about this matter and plenty of deep design. We are not through with our troubles yet."

"I wonder if——" begins Gypsy, and then suddenly stops short, looking at Senator John in a way that tells Bob she has been on the point of making some reference to her secret.

He will not ask her about it—she must tell him of her own free will, all in good time.

"What do you think of it, John?" asks Pemberton.

"Well, I am inclined to believe there is little of accident about the matter, though, of course, it might be so. Let's take Colonel Corneel and the lawyer for an example—they were floored at the church, but may have seen a way out, as they believe."

Bob frowns.

"Can you give a guess as to what they may have struck?"

"Well, let's look into the matter. How was it we turned their case upside down? By the introduction of good Doctor Hammond and his evidence regarding the mistake in the birthday of Mrs. Bob. His word—it would not have been sufficient, but he declares it is supported by documentary proof—that his report is filed at Richmond in the Register of Births."

"Jove! I begin to smell a rat!" cries Bob.

"You will, before long. In my opinion, they are now on their way East——"

"On to Richmond, you mean."

"Yes—to examine that same Registry of Births. If Doctor Hammond has been mistaken then the game is in their hands. On the contrary, should he prove to have been right, they must either throw up the sponge or go at something else."

"Then I see what must be done—I have a friend at Richmond, one Joe Hooker. I can depend on him. When we reach St. Louis I shall wire him and receive the answer at Cincinnati."

"To what effect—I see you grasp the situation?"

"He will proceed to the office where this registry of birth is kept, with a notary public, and make a copy of the entry by Doctor Hammond, which the notary will witness and swear to being correct."

Senator John slaps his hand down upon his knee with a sudden emphasis.

"Bob, I see your brain is as bright as when you are in the swim at the Exchange. Your suggestion is a good one—I don't see how it could be improved. Even if these rascals manage to destroy or change the record we will have it in black and white. Yes, get the dispatch ready—spare nothing—have it explicit and we are bound to win."

"I will write out a draft of it, John, and perhaps two heads will prove better than one."

"All right—when we reach St. Louis it will be ready to send."

"Plenty of time—this is a long trip," says Bob.

It does not occur to one of them that there is any need of haste—the plan is so bright, and success seems so sure, that they cannot imagine such a thing as fail, forgetting that they have opposed to them an unscrupulous French lawyer, than whom a harder being does not exist.

So they allow themselves to rest in the lull of the storm—during the night none of them feel any

worry because of the fact that enemies are on board the cars—all will be well.

The train makes remarkably good time while they sleep, and is well on the way to St. Louis when they get up in the morning.

Putting their heads together they soon construct a long message to Mr. Joe Hooker that will cover the case in all its bearings. This, Senator John, who has been an operator in his time, volunteers to get in at the office when they pull into St. Louis.

Unexpected delay comes—there is a wreck on the road ahead, and they are flagged. There they lie for hours, awaiting the clearing away of the *debris.* There is no station near, and so the monotonous hours pass away. Fortunately they have a hotel car on the train, and the passengers are not yet reduced to a state of actual hunger.

As Americans usually do under such circumstances, they take it all good naturedly and joke over the situation. Some even go forward to the scene of the wreck and assume entire charge of the work—at least, they bustle around with a great sense of importance and give orders to which no one pays the slightest attention.

They tell us that all things have an end, although one could mention a number that give little promise of such a heavenly consummation. At any rate, this delay does not last beyond a certain number of hours, and then, at nightfall, the track being cleared, they once more move on, though at a snail's pace for a long time.

Thus it is morning when they reach St. Louis. As

all are in the same boat, our friends do not worry about the matter.

Quite a lengthy stop is to be made here, and this gives Senator John a chance to hie away to the telegraph office in order to send the message in his possession, the composition of which does himself and Bob such credit.

He comes back to the car a short time before the train moves out.

"Hello!" cries Bob, "whence these tears?" for the usually urbane Senator is actually frowning.

"I don't know positively, but I have a lingering fear there is some trouble in store for us," he says, softly, noticing that Mrs. Bob is bending over her satchel; but she has quick ears, and instantly raising her head, looks him squarely in the eyes.

"Don't keep anything back on account of me," she says, smiling—"my husband will tell you I have a fair amount of nerve, and I believe it is best that the worst should be known."

"And I reckon you are right, my dear. I shall not try to keep anything hidden from you."

"You sent the message, Senator?"

"Yes, Bob, and saw that it went all right myself, for you know an old operator never loses the hang of the thing. That brings up the source of anticipated trouble."

"Yes—did you meet any one there?"

"Two of them—no more nor less than the French lawyer and our ex-Confederate colonel."

"They were telegraphing, too?"

"Yes, in a cipher to some one at Washington. Of

course, I could not make it out, but from their suspicious actions, when they saw me enter, I am ready to swear it had some connection with the registry book at Richmond."

"Just as like as not!" exclaims Bob, uneasily.

"I hope they haven't been ahead of us," says his wife, "for much as I have already from another source, I would hate to see the old Gordon place pass into the hands of such a man as Colonel Cornelius."

"After all, we may be borrowing trouble—crossing bridges before we come to them."

"And as we are on our wedding journey, we can't afford to let such things worry us. We'll make up our minds that all is well, and leave the rest to a higher power."

"Ah! we move—now it is on to Cincinnati, then over the Blue Ridge to Richmond."

So the city on the muddy Missouri is left far behind and they start to meet the sun in his daily journey, plunge along all day, and reach Cincinnati about dark.

Another night and day and they will be in Richmond, with everything favoring them—then the result of their telegraphing will be made manifest.

Bob it is this time who makes inquiries, and presently meets an official who hands him a sealed envelope. A minute later Pemberton enters the car, and holds a message aloft.

"Good news, I prophesy," cries Gypsy.

"No one could mistake that broad grin on Bob's face. From your friend at Richmond?"

"Yes—only a line or so—listen," he reads:

"Yours received—I will attend to the little matter at ten in the morning. JOE HOOKER."

As it turns out, had this same Joe Hooker set his time just an hour earlier, it would have been decidedly better for our friend's peace of mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOE HOOKER IN THE ARENA.

After receiving this message Bob seems to rest easily—he has great confidence in the ability of Joe Hooker to carry out any scheme.

From Cincinnati they cross into Kentucky, and follow the river up for many miles. During the night they push in among the rugged hills of West Virginia, and with the peep of dawn look out upon some of the most remarkable scenery in the country, for the valley of the New River, like that of the Emery, the French Broad, and other mountain streams, presents some picturesque sights.

Thus, as the day wears on, they advance upon Richmond. The course to-day is hardly to be compared with what it was twenty-eight years ago.

Then frowning cannon greeted the eye on all sides, and a hostile people, armed and desperate, met the

intruder, while the sights and sounds of cruel war were on every hand. Now all is peace and plenty—the lion and lamb lie down together and the only smoke to be seen comes not from gory battle-fields or burning towns, but from the cabins of the freed blacks or the engine that hauls their produce to market.

Virginia, mother of our country, is herself again, and may she never again know the ruin of a civil war.

"Another hour will see us through—are you tried, my little wife?" says Bob, as the day closes, and the sun sinks out of sight.

"Oh, no, I was thinking, that's all."

"Of what?"

"A variety of things connected with our fortunes. You can't do my thinking for me, Bob, though you are so very kind with everything else. When a girl gets married she has plenty to think about, I assure you. Perhaps it's my wardrobe I'm thinking about," with a light laugh.

Bob chooses to believe differently, but he does not say so. He is convinced that this secret, which has not been confided to him by his wife, is the cause of her anxiety.

"If she does not volunteer to tell me before long I shall feel compelled to ask about it for I can't see her troubled about anything," is what he says to himself, sitting there and watching the various lights and shadows flit over her face.

A good start, Bob Pemberton—if you show as

much solicitude over the comfort of your wife twenty years hence, you will do.

Richmond at last!

All in the car are preparing to leave, and it is easily seen how the trials of a long journey are forgotten when the port is reached. Even a lady who has been seasick all the way recovers almost magically, and smiles—she is home and her troubles are forgotten.

Senator John shows up, and as soon as the train stops our friends pass out. Presently they are in a vehicle and making for Ford's hotel. Bob is anxious again—he has given instructions in his dispatch to have his friend Joe meet him here, but can see no sign of him.

While at the desk registering, he is given a sealed envelope, which he thrusts into his pocket for the moment. When they are in their rooms he suddenly remembers this and opens it.

"Why, it's from Joe—listen to what he says."

"DEAR OLD BOY:—Received your dispatch—have been called away this P. M., and so can't meet you on arrival, though I may later. As I promised, at ten o'clock I went to the office of registry, taking with me a friend who is a notary public, and whose sworn document I inclose.

"I conceived an idea that I imagined might prove pleasant to you—and while there took a photograph of the page bearing the entry you mentioned. This I at once developed upon reaching home, and if the plate is dry, before I go away will strike off what we call a 'blue print,' and inclose it with this, so that you may see for yourself what it is.

"My heartiest congratulations on your marriage—

I know there is a story connected with it, and will take great pleasure in hearing it. Perhaps I can also tell you one that may equal it, as a strange thing happened to me of late. I shall also be delighted to meet Mrs. Bob. Please give her the regards of your old chum. JOE HOOKER."

"That is all?" asks Gypsy.

"Yes. Just written as Joe talks. He's a fine fellow, and I shall be glad to shake his honest hand again."

"Was there an inclosure?" asks Senator John, who has lingered a few minutes ere going away, lingered because he saw Bob receive the letter and could guess who sent it.

"I didn't see any—wait, where's the envelope—it may have stuck inside—sure enough," and he draws out a piece of paper white on one side, blue on the other.

It is a first-rate fac-simile of the page of a book covered with writing.

"Here it is, as plain as daylight."

"Read it out," says the Senator.

"Parents' names—Richard Harding Gordon, Ruth Alymer Gordon, Child girl, probable name Estelle. Physician, Oscar Hammond. Date of birth——"

"Go on—what ails you, man?" says John.

"Good Heaven! it was a terrible mistake, after all, Doctor Hammond made," says Bob.

"Explain your words."

"This date is October twenty-two."

"Are you sure, Bob?"

"Look for yourself, Senator."

There can be no mistake about it—the writing is

as plain as print, and the figure two stands out boldly.

"Sure enough, I was right, after all, about my birthday. There's some satisfaction in knowing that I haven't been making a goose of myself all along," says Mrs. Bob, so calmly that her liege lord turns and looks at her in amazement.

"Bless my soul, Gypsy, it's a pleasure to see you take it so coolly. On my part I'm not worrying over the money part of it so much as I am the fact that we have been outgeneraled."

"You hit the mark, my boy," declares Senator John, who has his fighting blood up, and ready to join in any game that promises success.

"Yes, outwitted, for I don't believe Doctor Hammond made any mistake in the matter."

"Oh! Bob, with even this evidence before you, and still a sceptic," says his wife.

"Yes, I'm dogged by nature—I simply believe Joe came in too late. The telegram Lawyer Merle sent from St. Louis was an important one, and it gave orders that won the game thus far. Look, my dear, you have sharp eyes—you can see that the second figure two is not like the first one—the shank is far too long. One makes his figures pretty much alike, but this man seems an exception to the general rule. I will tell you why. That figure was of another order—a plain one. Then a pen was drawn over it, transferring it to that which you see. Lawyer Merle has a willing tool and a sharp confederate here, but this time he overreaches himself."

"Now you inspire me with hope, dear Bob."

"What! Knowing me so well, could you think I would give up the fight so easily? That isn't my nature—I never could have battled among the bulls and bears in the stock pit unless I had good staying qualities. This is only a beginning. They may think they have won, but I'll soon startle them."

"In the first place," says Senator John, soberly, "if this figure has been altered within twenty-four hours an expert can readily detect it, for the remainder of the entry was made eighteen years back, and the ink is very aged. I have no doubt but what, with certain chemicals, this new figure can be removed, leaving the original in plain view. Such low cunning as this generally overreaches itself."

"It does me good to see you gentlemen take it all so good naturedly," remarks Bob's bride.

"Come, now, you are joking. I don't know how I look, but I feel like biting a nail in two. To think of that sly little French frog-eater laying a trap to trip me up, while we journeyed on in the full belief that the affair was settled. However, the laugh will yet be ours."

Such confidence is half the battle in a game like this, and both of those who hear his words are inspired by their boldness.

"I can help you, Bob. By rare good luck, I have a friend in Richmond who has always prided himself on being an expert at reading character by the handwriting. Yes, I've known him to be even called to New York to testify at some trial where millions were at stake. He claims to be able to tell the state of mind a person was in when he wrote the names.

It's astonishing how much these experts do know. Give me the letter and the blue print. Immediately we have dined I'll look up Josh Geddings, and get his opinion. If necessary, I'll take him to the register's office and let him examine the original. At haphazard, I believe I can promise you an encouraging report."

"John Archer, you are a friend in need. God bless you, my dear fellow. We will be down——"

"In ten minutes," finishes his wife, and that settles it, for Mr. Bob smiles and nods and Senator John makes a break for his own room to wash up.

Promptly when the ten minutes are up, they meet below and enter the dining-room. The trip has at least not taken away the good appetites they brought from the Colorado plateau, and it seems to be a merry party that surrounds a little table at one end of the long dining-room. For the time being they seem to forget the business that demands such close attention, and appear to be a merry party of travelers.

They notice that others have come to Ford's to make their headquarters. Monsieur Merle and his employer, Colonel Cornelius Gordon, eat at a table near by, and watch our friends carefully. Bob imagines that he can see the same old sneer on Corneel's face that a man may assume when he feels conscious of power, of success, when the wheel of fortune which he worships suddenly throws the tide in his favor.

Senator John has passed the word around that they had better not notice the others, and so they continue to chat, and appear so unconcerned that

the two men imagine they cannot know what a set-back has happened to their plans.

John Archer keeps his word. As they leave the dining-room he says to Bob:

"I'm off now to see the expert—give you his report when I return. Meanwhile you can be happy in the company of Mrs. Bob. Ah! my boy, you were a lucky fellow to draw such a prize as that in the lottery of life. I have seen so much of sorrow that it does my heart good to find friends thus united in such charming unity, soul responding to soul."

He squeezes Bob's hand, bows to Mrs. Bob, and is gone on his errand little suspecting what strange things this first night in Richmond is destined to produce.

Bob sends his wife up on the elevator and steps to the counter to buy some of the cigars for which this capital of the Old Dominion is famous, when, as he lights one, he is seized by the arm.

"Joe Hooker, by the powers!" he exclaims.

"Joe Hooker, with strange news for you, Bob, old fellow," returns the man whose hand he clasps.

BOOK THREE.

Following Destiny to New York.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADVICE—AT ONE DOLLAR A MINUTE.

Senator John, at eight-thirty P. M., rings the bell of a modest house not a stone's throw from the historic old church in which Patrick Henry delivered his passionate protest against the tyranny of taxation without representation, and declared that death were preferable to such liberty.

Having ascended the hill, Bob's stanch friend is almost out of breath when the door opens and light shines upon his face, coming from a lamp held in the hand of a man who, at sight of him, threatens to have an epileptic fit, or drop the means of illumination as he wrings John's hand, dragging him into the house.

"Remarkable—just received your letter from Denver this A. M., and, behold! the man I have imagined among the wild beasts of the mountains turns up at my door in the night. John Archer, there is more than accident in this."

The Senator laughs.

"It's all a part and parcel of a deep design, my dear Josh. I've a story to tell."

"Then sit down right there. What can I get you —are you hungry?"

"Just come from dinner at Ford's."

"Thirsty?"

"Couldn't drink a drop, my dear fellow, but since you are pressing——"

"Ah! you will have——"

"A smoke—I have never forgotten the sweet taste of your tobacco."

"Good. And I know you delight in smoking it from something foreign to an ordinary clay pipe. Tastes differ—prefer the latter. There's that Hindoo hubble-bubble affair upon the wall, or will you use this Turkish chibouque."

"That's the one Abdar Pasha gave you once for saving his life," caressing the amber mouthpiece and examining the precious wood with the reverence of an old traveler.

"Yes, fortune gave me an opportunity to do the brave old Turk a favor—I value that thing quite a good deal. Fill the bowl and light up, man. I'm with you—the sweetest smoke on earth to me is had in this red vessel made of Indian pipe clay. Comfortable, Senator John? Then suppose you fire away."

So John Archer begins.

There is no reason under the sun why he should not tell Josh Geddings the whole affair as he knows it, and before twenty minutes have gone by the other is in possession of the facts.

He proves to be a good listener and asks a few questions at points that seem hazy to him.

"Quite a novel, my good man; and so your friend Bob has already carried off the princess. Good. I shall be pleased to meet them both at their convenience."

"I can readily guess why I am wanted in this case. Bring on your documents and I'll be only too glad to give you a professional man's advice."

Whereupon Senator John claps in front of him Joe Hooker's communication. He carefully reads the letter first.

"A bright idea of Joe's, to photograph the page. Fine fellow, never met him—bless me, it will be a treat for you two travelers to get together and compare notes. And the stacks of fine views he has taken the world over—thousands of queer scenes. Jove! I never grow tired of looking through the glass at them myself."

"But the blue print."

"Pardon—never grow tired of talking, Senator. You know my failing, old fellow. Let me see—where are my microscopic glasses?"

He fusses around, produces a lamp with a powerful reflector, that sends a strong stream of light upon a certain spot on the table, puts on a pair of odd glasses, and scrutinizes the print.

Almost immediately he utters a snort of disgust.

"Such a bungling job—the idea of an expert's opinion being called for such amateur work. Why, even this blue print shows plainly what has been done. The ink used to make a two out of a figure

one is of a different shade. Senator, have no worry about this matter. You can confound the rascals as easy as—you smoke my chibouque."

Thereupon the said Senator John rises from his seat, waves his Turkish pipe above his head, and gives a genuine hurrah that a schoolboy might envy.

"Beg pardon, Geddings, but you have lifted the clouds. It isn't simply the million at stake we care about, but the principle of the thing, you know."

"Yes, the million is a mere bagatelle compared with it—always was with me—that is, some other person's million, for I never could get more than the first thousand started of mine. Make your mind easy about this thing. It is so easily detected that they have no show whatever. See here, I'll tell you what I can do—with a move of the hand wash off this new layer of ink and leave the original just as it was."

"I suggested that to Bob, and he was incredulous. You see, he didn't know you—hadn't read all the accounts of your skill as shown in many trials—see yonder scrapbook for particulars. He will have a better opinion of your abilities when you have demonstrated what a magician of the nineteenth century may do."

Then they fall to talking of future plans—Josh Geddings promises to visit the register's office in the morning, have the page in question carefully cut out and taken in charge by the official until wanted—this in order to prevent the lawyer or his confederates from destroying it.

Other talk follows.

It is eleven before Senator John can tear himself away from the society of Josh Geddings and that beloved chibouque and wends his way in the direction of the hotel, filled with satisfaction over the thought that he has accomplished the business he set out to perform.

Senator John does not dream that he has been watched by the shrewd lawyer, but such is, in fact, the case, for Monsieur Merle has followed him all the way from the hotel.

As Josh Geddings has a small nickel sign on his house, announcing his business as expert at chirography, it does not take the keen-witted Gaul half a minute to guess what is in the wind.

Perhaps John Archer has been gone five minutes when a ring at the bell brings Josh once more to the front door. As he sees the party who thus summons him, he instantly says to himself:

"Ginger! this is no other than Monsieur Merle, for the accurate description given by the Senator, aided by his own remarkable powers, enable him to thus recognize his caller.

Geddings is a Yankee—hence it may be understood that he is sharp enough to meet the lawyer and fight it out then and there on that line. He gives no indication that he sees before him any other than a total stranger.

"Pardon, do I address Monsieur Gedding?"

"I'm the party—what can I do for you, sir?"

"I wish to consult you on important business."

"Please step inside."

So the spider walks into the little parlor of his rival.

He is made comfortable, and glances around. The air is thick with tobacco smoke.

"Do you object—I have a window a little way open, and I can throw it wide?"

"No, no, do not, I beg. Better the smoke than to catch the death of cold. Besides, this smoke is pleasant—you use good tobacco—and smoke two pipes at once," as he sees the chibouque on the table still warm, for his fingers have touched it.

Josh smiles and removes his clay pipe with thumb and finger.

"Oh! I had company—an old friend popped in on me and we chatted over days gone by," he remarks, in an off-hand way.

"Such meetings are charming—zere is so much to say. But, monsieur, I have one leetle business with you. I understand you are what you call 'em a professor of chirography—zat is, you know all about ze handwriting on ze wall."

"I see you are a humorist, my friend. My business is in dealing with forgeries. If I do say it myself, I have made some hits in that line, and my prices are away up on that account. My testimony has been known to save a million."

"Begar! all I want is one leetle advice you would give zat for——"

"Ten dollars for ten minutes' time."

"It ees done, zere is ze money. Now, I note zat it just is twenty minutes after eleven. Until half past, Monsieur Geddings, you will talk and listen."

"Good! Delighted to do business with such a precise man; wouldn't mind sitting up all night."

"At one dollar a minute—excuse me. Pardon—pay attention, monsieur—I relate a little experience to get ze opinion of a man who saves millions."

"For others, and almost starves himself."

"At one dollar a minute—*Mon Dieu!* such staring I would like to do for a year—I should feast ze rest of my life. To business, as time flies, and ze dollars with it. Zere is one man we will call John ——"

"John—who?" asks the professor, quickly.

"Oh—John Smith will do to distinguish him."

"Is there any Pocohontas in this game?"

"Not zat I know of—you, too, are a man of humor. So much ze better—you will live long. Zis John Smith is in my employ—I am a merchant—I have ze great counting-rooms with one dozen clerks. I import ze champagne, zat makes ze young man's head whirl if he takes too much.

"I receive a note without a name—it tell me zat John Smith is living beyond his means. I am aroused—I set ze detective on his track—what do I find—begar! Ze young man ees married on ze sly—he has a fine establishment and a carriage. All zis on fifteen hundred a year in New York. Bah! impossible; but perhaps he marry a rich girl. I am unable to find zat out—ze detective can learn nothing.

"So I change ze game; I have an expert examine ze books. Zey balance, but he is puzzled over certain figures. What I desire to find out, in plain language, is zis. If figures have been alter a long-time

after ze originals were made, would it be an easy thing to discover zis fact?"

There it is in plain English.

Josh Geddings has made up his mind to deceive the lawyer—he does not want Monsieur Merle to imagine that he knows him. Therefore he elevates his eyebrows in surprise.

"A singular coincidence, I declare. Another party consulted me on about the same line this evening. I will tell you just what I did him—that it all depends on circumstances. If the ink used was the same, and several other matters neatly adjusted by the forger, it would be difficult, and under some conditions, well-nigh impossible to detect the fact, especially to prove it before a jury."

Monsieur Merle smiles and rubs his hands together—then remembering the part he plays he frowns and looks quite despondent.

"I am afraid zen we will have to call you in, Monsieur Geddings—at one dollar a minute. I would not wrong an innocent man."

"Ah! I honor you, sir."

"Nor do I wish to keep a thief in my employ. I see ze ten minutes are up"—as the French clock strikes the half hour gong—"and I will depart. Rest assured, you sall see me again."

"Delighted to know you, Mr. ——"

"Pardon—Anton Du Quesne, at your service."

And thus putting the seal to the great elaboration, the French lawyer bows himself out, leaving Josh smoking his red pipe and looking up through the white rings as he mutters:

"The little beast suspects—he will be up to more deviltry. At nine the registry office opens. Good! at eight I will see my friend the register, and together we will defeat the cunning of Monsieur Merle."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE.

Joe Hooker's face is one that would attract attention almost anywhere, it is so honest and bright. He seems serious enough, when uttering the words that greet his friend Bob, and that worthy is rather startled by their tenor.

"News of what, Joe?" he demands.

"Come over here to this quiet corner, where we can have a chat."

"I wouldn't care to remain too long away from Mrs. Pemberton," says the dutiful spouse—he has just been married a few days.

"Oh, she'll forgive you when she learns what kept you. Accept my congratulations in advance, my dear fellow. Come."

"I promised her——"

"This affair concerns a certain family by the name of Gordon, and I believe that was what your wife was called before she became Mrs. Bob. If there is anything you desire to have explained in connection

with that family, accept what the gods throw before you now."

That settles Bob.

We know there is a mystery connected with Gypsy that has given him considerable cause for worry, and with this chance for enlightenment before him, it would be strange indeed if he did not accept.

He accompanies Joe to the corner designated, where several chairs invite occupancy—goes with an eager air, and not as a lamb to the slaughter.

"Now, see here, there's no need of my beating around the bush. I'll get right at the heart of the matter in the start. Your wife's name before marriage was Estelle Gordon?"

"It was, positively."

"Granddaughter of a man whom half of Virginia knew, and who went by the name of Hermit Gordon —given name Rudolph?"

"Correct again."

"Perhaps you saw an account of his death in the papers a couple of weeks ago."

"Ten days rather—no, I didn't see it, for at the time I was on my way to Denver on business connected with this same Rudolph Gordon. I knew he died, for a telegram reached me to that effect."

"Well, there was a mistake made," coolly says this same Joe Hooker, just as if he were saying, "it's a lovely night."

Bob Pemberton, however, is not in the same condition of mind, and from his lips falls an expression indicative of intense surprise.

"Look here, Joe—I chanced to run across the

faithful servant who attended him, and not half an hour ago had a brief description of the funeral."

"Oh, ay, there was a funeral."

"Yet you have the assurance to say——"

"Bob, I'll tell you the story in newspaper reporter's style, and you can round out sentences and fill in to suit yourself. After I had attended to your business I went out of the city—had an engagement with a gentleman, old friend and patron of the public offices he has held. Found him in a feverish state of excitement—had sent for me to share his secret.

"When I heard it I was astonished—amazed—could hardly believe my ears. He brought proof—piled it up mountain high. My scepticism vanished, and I was ready to accept it all as so.

"His story—well, it ran about like this. Man of very peculiar habits—near him was a cemetery, and in it lie the remains of several very dear to him. General is something of a night hawk—says thought flows more freely with him when darkness covers the earth.

"It has been a habit of his to wander in the old graveyard after nightfall—singular fad, wasn't it, Bob. He was there one night a week or more ago, when he thought he heard a groan. Sure enough, it came from one of the grim old tombs.

"Most men would have taken to their heels and put for home—I believe you would—dead sure with regard to myself. This general is made of different stuff—proves it by taking his constitutional in a graveyard at night.

"What did he do—why, made a rush for that par-

ticular tomb, found the grated door unlocked, and actually burst in."

"Jupiter! I must meet the man who did that," says Bob, with deep admiration in his voice.

"Wait—when inside he struck a match—the sounds came from a new casket—he discovered some sort of tool, pried off the lid, and—his match went out.

Bob groans in sympathy.

"Upon lighting another he found an old man before him, alive—groaning—snatched him from the casket and carried him outside, slamming the door of the vault behind.

"The general chances to be a strong man—never would have been able to have carried that burden otherwise—got him to the house—kept it all a dead secret—day by day the old man grew better—never will be strong again in body, but mind as clear as a bell. By degrees story told—general feels he must confide in some one or he will die—remembers me—Providential thought, since I know you."

During the pause Bob is lost in amazement.

"Joe, do me a favor," he gasps.

"Well?"

"Pinch me—I believe I'm dreaming."

"Not much—you're wide awake, old man, and in a measure primed to hear more," says Hooker, in a nonchalant way, though secretly chuckling, for it is really a treat to see Bob Pemberton, cool Bob, all broken up.

"What! is there more—did the whole graveyard yawn and graves give up their dead?"

"Oh! no. That chapter is closed. There's another. It will surprise you quite as much as this."

"Wait till I give you a puff at this weed. Now, brace up—I'm ready to let her go.

"It seems to me fortune is rolling on thick and fast—if I had half such luck always I'd join you in Wall street. All these things happened within six hours, too, which is the queerest part of it.

"When I had heard the general's story, we talked it over, and decided what we should do. You are to go with me and see the old man who calls himself the Gordon, and identify him, after which the case will be placed in your hands.

"I left the general to return to Richmond by train. Had a rough time of it, quite a little wreck, and several injured. Fortune saved me any bruises and broken bones, and I set about rescuing the afflicted.

"Thus it happened that I came in contact with a young woman, quite good looking, who had a broken limb. I carried her from the cars to the nearest house. She was crazed with pain, and believed death was about to claim her for a victim. She raved, even while I had her in my arms, pleading for mercy.

"I paid no attention at first until she mentioned a name—it was that of your wife—that which I had photographed and made a blue print of. Then my interest was aroused—I listened, believing I was doing right and serving you.

"So I learned the young woman whom I carried from the wreck was a Gordon, too—a daughter of our

doughty Colonel Cornelius, so well known in Richmond, but believed to be a bachelor.

"She had been tempted to visit the register's office, examine the books, and make an alteration."

"What?" says Bob, mechanically, for he is so utterly confused by this unexpected rich treat of good things that he is hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes, this Blanche Gordon thus confessed, in her agony, that she changed a figure in the birth entry of your wife—she had yielded to temptation, and conscience accused her.

"Very fine girl she appears to be, and I have been quite smitten with her, in spite of the fact that she is a daughter of Cornelius Gordon. I've about concluded to enter the lists myself, and make your wife's uncle acknowledge this young creature."

"Hello! leans that way, eh?"

"Nonsense—purely philanthropical, I assure you. Glad to do any one a good turn."

"Funny thing," persists Bob.

"What?"

"If, after all, we, who have been so thick in the past, should marry cousins."

"Just your luck, Bob, old boy, to get the heiress. Now, you've heard my story—let's have yours."

"First, where is Blanché Gordon?"

"At the hospital, in the pay department. I saw her taken there myself, and ordered that nothing should be lacking in their care of her. She will not communicate with any one else. Now, spin your yarn, for I know it must be a queer one."

Bob does so, beginning with his visit to Virginia,

the meeting with Rudolph Gordon, and his trip to the West. Other events follow—he is a fairly good narrator and the subject is such that he can do justice to it.

Joe is thrilled.

"Quite a romance—and to think how neatly you played your part in securing a wife. Well, I quite envy you, Bob, seeing that you are happy. Take me to Mrs. Pemberton."

"On one condition, sir."

"Well," repeats Hooker, "what is the condition on which you will allow one to meet your wife?"

"That you don't fall in love with her," says Bob.

Joe Hooker laughs.

"To confess the truth, my dear boy, I'm afraid I have received an electric shock under my vest from a blue-eyed battery. You see she moaned so pitifully, and clung to me when I carried her, that it quite touched my heart——"

"Nonsense—never knew one more tender. In plain English, Joe, you've jumped into love. Well, it's a common fate when one Bob Pemberton gets into the mess. Say no more, but come with me."

"To Mrs. Bob"—they all fall so naturally into this habit of calling her by that name.

"Yes."

"See here, do you want me to tell her all?"

"Everything."

"But she is a woman—a feeling of horror might come over her—she might faint——"

"Come—you are speaking of no ordinary milk and water woman. Gypsy Gordon never winced when she

faced that panther and the sea of fire—she met the emergency when those two rascals sought to destroy her property, and you remember I told you how she avenged an insult at the hands of her cousin, Guy Livinsgtone."

"Not another word, Bob. You make me more than ever anxious to meet this remarkable woman. I am ready to go."

So, a few minutes later, Bob knocks at the door of the little parlor that is a portion of their suite of rooms.

"Enter," says a voice that is music in his ears.

"Joe Hooker, my love."

Gypsy meets him with a frank shake of the hand that quite charms Joe, and he quickly realizes that his friend has hardly exaggerated the case when he described his wife with the enthusiasm only an ardent lover could show.

Then they settle down to a long talk that touches all the minor points of the game. Gypsy proves that woman's wit is keen by bringing out several things the others have not considered. It is good policy to have various minds engaged, as the whole ground is covered.

While they are still enjoying their chat a knock sounds on the door, a timid knock. Bob opens and finds Senator John there.

"Hope I'm not intruding," begins this worthy, when Bob grasps him by the arm and drags him into the room.

"Just in time—we'll go over it all again, and you shall tell us what success you had," declares Bob,

after Joe and the Senator have gravely shaken hands.

"Oh! my friend, the expert, has no doubt in the world the figure was altered," says Archer.

"And my friend, Joe Hooker, has just carried out of a railway wreck the party who confesses to having committed the said alteration," at which Senator John throws up the sponge, confessing himself beaten in the very first round.

Then they take pity on him, and tell him all, which, of course, astonishes him not a little, and gives him great pleasure.

"It beats everything I ever knew," he says, as he grasps Bob's hand and squeezes it, as though in this way he would express his congratulations at the turn affairs have taken.

Then a council of war follows, and a plan is laid out by means of which they may hope to outwit the enemy. Every one has a part in it, and all enter into the game with a determination to succeed if it be possible.

At midnight they separate.

In the morning Senator John makes his way to the home of the register, the State officer who keeps an account of the numerous documents and books on file. It is fortunate he is personally acquainted with this official, or he would never have been able to secure the favor he did.

Together they proceed to the office an hour before the time of opening and take the volume containing the disputed entry to Josh Geddings. The expert is glad to see them, and immediately dashes a rag, soaked in some liquid, upon the writing. When

he takes it off, a minute later, every remnant of the new ink comes with it, while the old remains intact.

At this Senator John gives vent to his satisfaction in a shout—he sees the figure one in place of the artificial two.

"Take notice, gentlemen, there is the date. Make a note of it on paper," he says.

"I can do better that that—I have a means of reproducing the whole page in detail," said Josh.

"Excellent—how long will it take you?"

"Not more than fifteen minutes."

Senator John consults his watch.

"That gives us time to get back to the office. Shall he go on, Mr. Register?"

"Certainly. I am quite interested in this matter, as strange a case as I ever knew. Reproduce the page, both sides of it, and then, if the page should, by any means, be destroyed, we will be able to replace it."

So Josh Geddings sets to work, and the others watch him curiously. His ingenuity promises success —he does not explain his method, but within less than the stipulated time he holds up two papers.

"Will that do!" he says, quietly.

The others examine his work and pronounce is excellent—indeed it covers the ground completely, and they have only praise for it.

"Now I will return to the office and put the volume where it belongs. During the day we have many visitors, and, if possible, we will watch to see if any one attempts to mutilate it."

So saying, the register leaves them. Senator John is desirous of getting back to Bob, and also bids his

friend good-by for the present. Those counterparts of the pages in the book will yet confound the rascals who scheme for the Gordon estate, if they try to work their little game.

Arriving at the hotel, he finds Bob absent, and sits down to await his coming, pondering over the odd things that have come to pass in the romantic history of the past few weeks. Strange what a ruminating creature a man becomes, once he gets a good cigar or a beloved pipe between his teeth. Senator John seems to see a picture of the whole past spread out in the wreaths of blue and gray smoke that curl so lazily upward from his weed.

Then his eyes fall upon a face he knows, and he comes out of dreamland to stern reality—earth and bother. It is Joe Hooker, and there is a look upon his face that the Senator analyzes for trouble ahead.

"Where's Bob?" is his first question.

"Out somewhere."

"Sorry for that. Want to see him the worst kind, and make some new arrangements."

"I thought we decided all that last night."

"Ah! Senator, our caucus is overthrown. Fate has knocked us out," says Joe, with a long face.

"What! is the old man dead, after all?"

Hooker shrugs his shoulders in a comical way and says:

"Really, I could almost wish he were. Instead of that, he is too much alive—in plain Hottentot English, he's taken French leave."

"Gone to his own place at Gordonville?"

"Well, it's rather an open question that will have

to be decided by investigation. Perhaps it may be so. One thing I have learned gives me cause for considerable worry, Senator."

"Tell me if you care to, Mr. Hooker."

"The enemy have got wind of his presence above ground—Heaven alone knows how. When I asked at the door for my friend, what was my surprise to have the servant who recognized me say there had been some one inquiring after the sick old gentleman just before, and pointed him out going down the street, when I recognized, even with a glance at his back the lawyer, Monsieur Merle."

At this Senator John puffs out a billow of smoke and exclaims:

"Great Scott! do you suppose he can have fallen into the hands of these merciless sharks who are so deep in the mire that they would hesitate at nothing now to gain their end?"

"No, from all that I have heard, I'm of the opinion that they had nothing whatever to do with the disappearance of Rudolph Gordon, who climbed out of his window in the night-time, descended a tree and fled, being perhaps out of his mind. I am also positive that the servant, not being warned, and influenced by the suave tongue of Monsieur Merle, told more about the disappearance of his singular charge than was proper, and, as a consequence, they may even now be on his track while we waste time. Such bold plotters can see a way clear if once that old man falls into their power. Oh! if Bob were only here."

"Who takes my name in vain?" laughs the individual mentioned, coming suddenly upon them.

Joe Hooker takes him in hand, and when he hears the latest developments in the case, Bob has a revulsion of feeling, the laugh seems to leave his face or change into a look of concern, for he realizes, perhaps to a greater degree than the Senator has done, what it means for them.

Fortunately, Pemberton is a man of action, a man who cannot be dazed by any sudden misfortune—who bears up bravely under weights that might overwhelm most persons.

We have seen this characteristic shown before—when he saved the charming creature who has now become his wife. Bob Pemberton is only acting the part that long habit has constituted a portion of his nature. His training in Wall street has at least served him well on several occasions.

So Bob rises grandly to the occasion and at once takes the reins in his hands.

"Joe, are you at leisure—can you enter this game for a ten thousand dollar fee providing we win?"

"Ten thousand—you take my breath away, man. Why, that would give me five years' travel in the oddest corners of the world," gasps Hooker.

"With a companion as fond of world trotting as yourself, and able to pay his own expenses," puts in Senator John, calmly.

The two men then shake hands, while Bob actually smiles to see them.

"Count me in to the death, Bob," cries Joe.

"I'm with you, old fellow—you know that without telling," says the Senator, eagerly.

"Many thanks, both. Joe, will you step over to

the clerk yonder and find out about the time of trains to Gordonville?"

The individual mentioned does not delay a moment, but is gone.

"Senator, will you get a carriage to hold four."

"Then Mrs. Bob——"

"Goes where we do."

John Archer makes for the door with the speed of a Mercury.

Bob waits.

Presently Joe turns up.

"What time have you?" he demands.

"Five minutes to eleven."

"Train leaves for Gordonville at eleven—won't be another till evening."

Bob does not collapse—these emergencies show what metal a man is made of.

"If I could only reach the right man I'd have that train wait for us. As it is, we will be compelled to try something else."

Senator John now shows up.

"Carriage is waiting."

"I'll get Gypsy."

"But, Bob, only three minutes remain—you can't get that train," declares Joe.

"Well, perhaps we can reach Gordonville in some way or other. I'll find out just how far it is, and what can be done with a special train, and if that fails we still have the carriage."

He leaves the others and seeks his wife, to hurriedly give her an idea of the case. Particulars can

be had while *en route*. She will trust to his judgment in the matter, and do whatever he advises.

In a very short time he appears, accompanied by his wife, ready for traveling. On the way he addresses a few words to the clerk, telling him to hold their trunks and rooms until he hears by wire what to do with them.

"Now for the carriage."

In another minute they are off for the station, just seven minutes after train time.

"I've known of trains in Virginia that were delayed half an hour in starting. These single track roads can never be depended on," remarks Joe, consolingly.

"That would be too good luck—don't count on it. You'll find we have to depend on ourselves pretty much for everything gained here," answers Bob, who gave over long ago trusting to fortune.

And he is quite right, too.

Reaching the station, they find that the train has started exactly on schedule time. Can they hire a special to take them to Gordonville? Such a thing astonishes the official in charge. A special on this road is rather an unknown quantity, and they are hardly prepared for it.

He endeavors to appear as though such a demand were a daily occurrence—these railway officials do not like to be looked down upon, no matter if they represent a line five miles long. He assumes a thoughtful air, glances over some files and books of accounts, and consumes at least six or seven minutes before he shakes his head,

"Sorry to disappoint you, sir, but every engine is engaged—awful busy just at present—any other time we could accommodate you."

That ends it.

Bob thanks him, and secures a railroad map of the Old Dominion, with time tables.

Retiring to a corner he and Joe Hooker endeavor to study out a plan of campaign, while the Senator enjoys a *tete-a-tete* with Mrs. Bob, who casts numerous glances over to where her liege lord is puzzling his brains over the problem of how to reach Gordonville in the shortest possible space of time.

"There has been a change in my experience," says John Archer, with a smile—"once before I, with a few others, notably a man named Grant, were confronted with the problem of how to get into Richmond. That puzzle bothered us many months. Now the question is how to get out of the immortal capital on the James."

This appears to strike John's wife as ludicrous, for she gives vent to a little gush of laughter that causes her husband to look up in surprise, wondering what can arouse her when the case is so desperate.

"Poor Bob," she says, sympathetically, "he does look so forlorn. Generally he can meet difficulties and overcome them in grand style, but once in a long time I have to help him cut. It began that way, you remember, Senator. I've been brought up in and around Richmond pretty much, and perhaps I can solve the knotty problem. Kindly hand me that railway guide."

She fingers the pages with a dexterity that promises

great results, studies the columns and before five minutes have gone smiles sweetly.

"I think I can see a chance to save time. There is a train that leaves for Fayette at three-ten. That place is only nine miles from Gordonville. A vehicle will take us there. I have never gone over the road, but we might chance it."

Senator John catches the eye of Pemberton and beckons him over.

"Have you reached any conclusion?" he asks.

"Not yet. We have several plans under consideration, but I'm far from satisfied. Why do you ask—has Gypsy been up to her old tricks?" with a loving glance at Mrs. Bob.

"Well, I thought that unless you have discovered some better way of treating the subject, we might do worse than take the train for Fayette at three-ten, and with a vehicle reach Gordonville, just nine miles away," she replies, modestly, whereat Bob nods his head vigorously.

"Far the best plan yet, and better than our choice, which was to reach the place by a relay of carriages. One suggestion Joe made—do you know of any one there who could be trusted with a secret?"

"Yes—there's Seth Tucker, our constable, who always thought much of me. He is secretive, steady, reliable," she replies.

"Good. I shall wire Seth Tucker instantly to watch the train arriving from Richmond, and if an old man alights who resembles the dead Rudolph Gordon, to keep near him and neither allow him to escape nor harm befall him."

"Splendid!" clapping her hands.

"And sign your name to it."

"He will do much for me."

"Who wouldn't," declares the admiring Bob, at which she shakes her finger at him, and he hurries away, thinking he ought to be the happiest man on Virginia soil, with such a bright wife.

Straight to the telegraph office he hies, and presently over the wires is flying a message that will certainly electrify the operator at Gordonville, who has little outside of routine work to keep him busy during the day—a message that will also startle old Seth Tucker and cause him to think a revolution is at hand, when the entire police force of Gordonville, as constituted in himself, is set to work ferreting out a deep mystery.

This done to the satisfaction of the committee of one, Bob returns to his party, and the whole of them once more bring up at Ford's. Although they have apparently been baffled thus far by fate, they do not intend to sleep over it.

In season they sally forth to catch the three-ten train for Fayette, and this time all go prepared for a journey, Bob carrying a satchel which his wife claims.

The train leaves twenty minutes late, and they advance at a snail's pace. Bob and the Senator exchange glances, and smile dismally—this is poor progress when haste is needed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WALKING WAS GOOD.

Of course it would not be complete without a breakdown. The accident occurs to the engine, and they lie still for some twenty minutes. Bob, usually so cool, actually fumes, the Senator walks up and down outside, smoking, while Joe finds certain pleasure in chatting with Gypsy, and, in a sly way, ascertaining whether she knows anything about a cousin named Blanche, or if indeed, she has ever heard that Colonel Corneel was married.

At length the Senator marches down in the direction of the engine. Five minutes later he turns up, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Turn out!" he says.

"Wherefore?" demands Bob.

"The walking is good to Fayette."

"Yes, but the distance?"

"One mile."

"Ah! then we're with you, my friend, if there's any likelihood of a long stay here."

"Gypsy, what do you say?"

"I can walk with the best. You remember you once called me a Diana," she laughs.

They joke each other at the odd spectacle of four travelers stringing down the track, with what baggage they possess, while the sun hangs over the

western hills—it is such a sensible idea that their example is soon copied by several others on the stalled train, which, by the time it pulls into Fayette, will have few passengers aboard.

It is not more than a mile they have to tramp, and with fair walking they reach the town at about ten minutes after four.

Bob immediately makes inquiries regarding a livery stable, and finds what he seeks near at hand. Already they realize that the chances are they cannot make anything by this move, bright though it seemed at the time—that had they waited for the evening train to Gordonville it would have been well. However, they have gone too far to retreat now, and must proceed.

At least fortune favors them in securing a good pair of horses, and a driver who knows the hilly country around like a book. They are assured it is a rough mountain ride, but remain undaunted.

Away they go.

Bob's wife is full of enthusiasm with regard to the venture. A ride over the mountains of her native State pleases her.

At first all goes well.

Their horses are fresh and they make good time across the valley. One range of hills is ascended—the view from the top, looking backward, is sublime, for the beautiful valley lies there bathed in the mellow glow of afternoon sunshine, the trees masses of orange and bright red.

A look ahead is really appalling when the fact is taken into consideration that they must continue

this journey for the most part after night, and the mountains rear themselves beyond the second valley like a barrier.

Not one of the little company falters, though Bob crawls out while the driver is giving his horses a couple of minutes' rest, and asks numerous questions concerning the road ahead, and the probability of their reaching Gordonville in sound condition.

Then away they go again.

Down into the second valley they descend, and here the shadows of night begin to overwhelm them. It is a romantic spot—so weird, so wild, and Gypsy, whose soul is that of a child of nature, draws great breaths of inspiration as she watches, and cannot be influenced to take her head away from the window of the carriage.

While Bob was bargaining for the vehicle the thoughtful Senator had dodged into a convenient bakery, and quickly emerged bearing a mysterious bundle, which he now produces, showing a loaf of bread, butter, and various triumphs of the baker's skill at cake making as practiced by the professional at Fayette.

They have much fun over the disposal of this wonderful lot of crullers and rolls and currant cakes, but it answers fairly the demand for a supper, and they are not in a condition to quarrel.

"This is quite romantic," declares Joe, enthusiastically.

"Only requires the sudden stoppage of the vehicle and the appearance of fierce brigands at the windows to make us think we are in Spain or Italy," says Bob.

Hardly had he spoken when the carriage comes to a sudden halt.

"Prepare to deliver!" exclaims Bob's wife, dramatically.

"Jove! unless I'm mistaken there are some rascals in these mountain fastnesses—a crowd known to the Richmond authorities as the Bagley gang, and the leader is about as desperate a fellow as one could run across in a year. Of course I don't know whether they have taken to stage robbery or not, but a chance like this would probably seem like a fine streak of fortune to them.

The Senator whistles.

"Get out your firearms, friends. Prepare to sell your lives dearly," he says.

"Perhaps our driver is in league with the robbers," suggests Mrs. Bob.

"Had I better finish him at once?" laughs her husband.

The sudden starting of the vehicle prevents this dark deed from being consummated, and, for the present, all fears of brigands are banished. At any rate, the little scare has shown them the chances of meeting such an adventure, and brought to light a deadly array of revolvers that might well cause any would-be robber to fall back aghast.

They keep on for a short distance—perhaps a quarter of an hour of climbing the mountain road continues, and then comes another sudden stop.

Voices are heard.

This looks like business, and Bob nudges the stout Senator, fearing he has gone to sleep, though there

is little danger of that with the coach lurching from side to side in such an extravagant way.

"I'm on deck, my boy," answers the old tourist, in a stage whisper, which, however, reaches other ears.

"Do you think we'll be attacked?" asks Gypsy.

"Probably not, but some one is talking to the driver, and we had better be prepared."

They can see a fire blazing without and although the place is surrounded by trees, and walls, making it naturally gloomy and dark, the tongues of flames, feeding on the resinous pine wood, light up the scene in a weird manner.

Without any warning a head, surmounted by a shock of hair, suddenly appears at the door of the vehicle and a nasal voice says:

"Gentlemen, if you value your lives——" when four terrible weapons are suddenly thrust into his face, almost paralyzing the wretch and causing his shock of hair to stand on end.

"Great shucks!" he is heard to gasp, faintly.

Before any further action is taken the driver of the vehicle comes to the rescue.

"Hold up, gents, don't fire!" he exclaims.

"We've got the tables turned and might as well make him hand over his ducats," says Bob.

"Who d'ye take him for, gents?"

"One of the Bagley gang, perhaps old Jim himself," replies Joe, whereat the Jehu laughs, hoarsely.

"Why, this here old innocent air Peter Ginsing, the charcoal burner. He thought as how he'd do you a service. Reckon you're nigh scart his wits out."

The quartet of revolvers disappears.

"We beg his pardon. Peter, accept this as an apology," and Bob thrusts a big cartwheel silver dollar into the black hand of the charcoal burner who seems to breathe easier when that terrible array of firearms no longer stares him in the face.

"What were you about to tell us, my man?"

"Well, yer see, the road yer on is dangerous. It goes right past whar ole Jim an' his gang hole out —sartin sure ter hev trouble," says Peter.

"Is there any other to Gordonville?"

"By goin' back a mile y'ell come acrost one. Reckon ther driver is a knowin' o' it."

"Yes, I've heard about it, but this is the best road, if ye ain't worryin' about Jim," returns that worthy.

A hurried council of war is held.

Strangely enough Mrs. Bob sounds the keynote of the campaign when she says:

"I am for war. We will lose time in going back, and may waste the whole night, as the road is unfamiliar to the driver. Count me as voting for an advance along the whole line."

The others applaud her decision.

"That settles it—driver, push on. Peter, good-night, and many thanks to you."

So they leave the blazing fires of the charcoal burner and continue along the lonely road.

"We must be more than half way—my bright idea did not turn out so well, after all," says Gypsy, but the others will not hear of her taking any blame for their delay.

Their advance is all very well, and if nothing happens, in another hour and a half they may expect to drive into Gordonville.

Joe Hooker, for a change, has taken his seat outside, and enjoys a cigar, as they can get an occasional whiff of the smoke, though Gypsy begged him not to leave on her account, as she has always rather enjoyed the odor of a good weed.

They have reached the apex of the range and are on a level stretch of road, when once more the horses are thrown on their haunches and the vehicle comes to a stand—this time a shot is heard—the plain, unmistakable report of a firearm.

"That means business, by Jove!" exclaims Bob.

CHAPTER XX.

STOPPED ON THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS.

Sounds of confusion are heard, lights flash here and there, lanterns and torches, while deep voices are shouting.

Bob turns to the other two.

"Remain inside the vehicle."

It is all he says as he opens the door, springs to the ground, and shuts the means of egress; but Gypsy already has her head outside the window.

"Oh! Bob, be careful—do nothing rash," she says.

He makes some hurried reply, and then vanishes in the darkness, as though he really means to give them the slip, but none of them believe any such thing, of course, knowing him too well for that.

By this time the sounds are all around them, and there can be no doubt but that here in the mountains of Old Virginia they are about to experience what has befallen many a traveler in the Old World and California.

Jim Bagley and his set of outlaws do not often have a rich prize thus come into their very hands, and consequently they will not neglect the opportunity to replenish their depleted treasury.

Rough faces are seen on both sides of the vehicle, and imperative demands made for an unlimited circulation of silver or greenbacks—these men who hide in the fastnesses of the mountains do not care particularly which.

The Senator does not know the plans of this comrades, but guesses that they desire to keep the rascals from firing into the vehicle.

Instead, therefore, of showing any weapon, he attempts to parley with them. They believe they hold the power in their hands, and as there is no immediate necessity for haste they meet him squarely, and attempt to explain why it will pay all in the vehicle to pan out what they have.

As far as the Senator can see, there are some seven of the fellows, most of them angular mountaineers, and doubtless daring enough. He expects to hear from Bob and Joe every moment, and cannot make out why they are silent.

Just as patience ceases to be a virtue with the men, and they are demanding in no uncertain tones that the inmates of the vehicle step out and be searched, the event which Senator John has been awaiting so eagerly occurs.

Loud shouts burst out, and the shots begin to rattle at a lively rate. If one did not know any better, he would be apt to believe there were half a dozen in the attacking force at least.

Naturally the outlaws are demoralized, not dreaming of such a thing. They doubtless imagine this has been some trick of the officials to effect their capture —that the carriage is a bait, and in attacking it they have fallen into a trap.

It does not matter that few are hurt by the rapid discharge of firearms—the panic is the same. For one full minute pandemonium reigns—shouts mingle with shots, hurrying figures surge this way and that. Bob and Hooker rush upon the scene, still firing to wound, while they add their voices to swell the clamor, and even Mrs. Bob thinks she ought to scream to have a finger in the pie. Luckily, the driver succeeds in a measure in restraining his horses, which prance and endeavor to dash away.

The outlaws in their demoralized state have by this time melted away—some run, others crawl, and one fellow actually rolls into the bushes. As the coast seems clear Bob and his friend run after the carriage, which is moving along the road, the driver being unable to longer restrain his steeds.

Joe climbs up the back. Bob finds a door open for him, a helping hand is extended and he is half

dragged into the coach, which now begins to make better time, as the driver allows his horses a little more freedom.

Soon the brow of the elevation will be reached, and then they must descend, when the brake with which the vehicle is provided will be brought into requisition.

Bob has his head out and listens—above the rattle of the wheels he hears shots in the rear, and might imagine the mountain brigands were having it out among themselves only that one of the bullets sings merrily by, in close proximity to his ear.

It is evident, then, that the Bagleys have recovered some of their usual fighting qualities, and are chasing the carriage, which, with its contents, seems to be giving them the slip, after all.

If it were daylight they could make such good time that the danger of being overtaken must be reduced to a minimum; but at the same time there would be a chance of a rifle bullet from some keen-eyed mountaineer's weapon dropping a horse.

At last they are over the brow of the hill, and for a brief time beyond range of their determined pursuers.

Bob does not like this running business, but it is certainly policy, and besides how can they help it. The worst part of it all is this haphazard shooting. At any instant a bullet may dash into the vehicle and kill one of them.

He places Gypsy in a position where she will be, in a measure, protected by the valises, but she immediately divines his motive and refuses to profit by it.

"If you take the chances surely I can, Bob," is what she says.

Bob is already thinking of something else.

"Have you reloaded, Senator?" for he had borrowed the other's revolver ere leaving the coach.

"Yes," comes the reply.

"Then we must get out and drive these fellows back. They haven't had enough yet."

"Nothing would suit me better—sort of revive old recollections of these same hills, you know," replies the traveler, eagerly.

"I'll tell Joe."

"You mean to leave me here alone in the coach," cries Gypsy.

"You are not afraid, dear?"

"I rather guess not," she laughs.

Bob pokes his head out, and punching Joe tells him what must be done. As the lead is beginning to fly around them again very much like rain, it seems that they cannot be too speedy about carrying this game into execution.

As the driver slackens the pace a little they jump out at either side, leaving Gypsy to shut the coach doors. The vehicle rattles on.

"Joe," says Pemberton, softly.

"Here!" and that individual rises near them.

"Let us crouch behind this log and make an ambush. See, they will presently be outlined against the horizon—the sky above."

The others recognize the truth of Bob's words, and catch the drift of his plan. They immediately drop into position, and a line of three revolvers is

presented over the old fallen forest monarch. Perhaps, in the dark days, from '61 to '65 this same spot may have witnessed scenes not unlike the one now occurring, for along the border States brothers often fought each other, and father was pitted against son.

"There they come," whispers Joe.

Senator John heaves a sigh.

"Hate to do it, but the old spirit is still alive, and—make your shots tell, my boys," he says.

"Ready?" demands Bob.

Both of the others answer in the affirmative.

"Then let drive."

The Bagleys have indeed burst into plain view—they are outlined against the heavens as they run along down the hillside road, firing as they come, and evidently determined to get game this time. Seldom have these fellows been thus balked in their intentions, and it is certainly aggravating to have such a rich prize come to their very stronghold and slip out of their grasp. Hence these frantic efforts on their part to recover the lost ground.

When Bob gives the order, the three of them fire—the trio of reports sounds almost in unison, and then commences a rattling discharge, like the popping of a pack of firecrackers.

The effect is startling upon the advancing foe—they halt and reel backward with shouts that tell of sudden consternation—dismay. An ambuscade is a deadly affair—they know its possibilities well, but as a general thing they have been at the other end of the guns that did the firing.

"Enough!" says Bob.

"It's as good as a feast," chimes in Joe.

The last vestige of the enemy has vanished amid the bushes, and there is no use in wasting good ammunition on the air. So they turn once more to run after the vehicle.

When they have gone some little distance and fail to run across the carriage, it begins to look as though something not down on the programme had occurred.

"Confound it, I'm afraid," mutters Joe.

"Of what?" demands Bob.

"That rascally Jehu!"

"Well, what of him?"

"He's run away with your wife."

At this Pemberton actually laughs.

"Shows how little you know Mrs. Bob. That driver may be enterprising, and perhaps something of a schemer, but when he undertakes to get the best of my wife in a deal like this, he goes beyond his depth."

"Such confidence is sublime," murmurs the Senator.

"Listen."

All stand still and strain their ears in the endeavor to make out sounds. All they can hear seem to be voices on the rise above—probably the badly demoralized remnants of the Bagleys comparing notes and ascertaining damages.

"Makes me think of a scattered covey of quail peeping to each other in the bushes," declares Joe, jokingly.

"I hear nothing of the carriage," remarks Bob.

"What do you take that a sign of?"

"The coach has stopped. Even if it had kept on the go all the time since we left it, there has been no chance of its getting beyond hearing distance under these conditions. Come on."

Once more they advance down the hill road on a run, with ears strained to catch any sounds ahead. Ah! that was very like the stamping of an impatient horse. Bob chuckles as he runs.

A minute later, and they hear a voice ahead—a woman's voice, and yet decided—firm.

"Be careful, sir. Hold them in on your life, for if they go you do, too. Not another jump, not another yard shall we advance. You didn't know Mrs. Bob Pemberton when you tried to run away with a poor lone woman," says this ringing voice.

Bob nearly bursts with pride.

"Gentlemen, hear—that's my wife!" he says, and the others join in his enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GHOST WALKS AT GORDON MANOR.

They reach the coach.

Mrs. Bob greets their coming with some satisfaction, and sure enough they find her covering the rebellious driver with just as much enthusiasm as she ever did a covey of quail.

Bob is for demanding explanations of the driver—the fellow is abject in his fear, and claims that it was his horses that were at fault, and only by the most strenuous exertion did he succeed in quieting them at last—a man can do much when his life is at stake.

This is not the time for entering into any controversy, as minutes are precious, and the Bagleys may recover enough nerve to come sneaking around, thinking to get a snap-shot from cover at the parties who have worsted them so badly.

So they all enter.

The journey is resumed, and in due time ahead of them they sight the lights of Gordonville.

"Look there!" cries Bob, who has his head out of the carriage window, and all obey.

They see sparks flying upward from some rapidly moving object in the distance, that appears to be heading toward Gordonville.

Bob's wife laughs.

"That's the train we would have taken in comfort, only for my bright idea," she says.

"Never mind," declares the Senator, intending to comfort her, "we've had a great time of it."

"And passed through several strange experiences we will not soon forget," adds Bob.

"It's a race to see which will enter town first. Tell the driver to whip up, Bob, dear."

So they go along at a rapid rate, and at last have the satisfaction of beating the train from Richmond into town about three minutes, which feat elates Mrs. Bob considerably.

"There, say we haven't done well," she exclaims,

clapping her hands and appearing to enjoy the fact as though it were a great victory.

"Well, here we are at Gordonville. Now, what is to be the programme?" says Joe, as, having paid the driver and dismissed the vehicle, they stand in front of the only inn the town can boast.

"We settled that on the way here. Get another carriage and have the driver take us out to the Gordon Manor house. Gypsy knows about it—she's at home here."

"Yes, come with me. There's a darky close by who has a vehicle for hire—rather dilapidated to be sure, but it will answer our purpose, and Uncle Daniel thinks a good bit of me."

"Who wouldn't?" whispers foolish Bob, in her ear, for you know the honeymoon is still on—not that his love will ever change, but it will learn to live without these foolish little ebullitions.

Uncle Daniel is found and is only too proud to serve "Missy Gypsy," as he knows her. So, entering his ancient vehicle, the steed is whipped up and away they go.

Even Bob recognizes familiar landmarks, for it was only a short time before that he came to visit his friend near this place, and shoot "partridge," as they call our quail in Virginia.

"We'll soon be there. I do hope we find that nothing has happened to him," Gypsy says, and they all know whom she means.

The ride is not very long.

Uncle Daniel has his orders and knows where to

halt. They leave the vehicle and advance along the road until some white posts loom up.

"Here's the gate," says Gypsy.

"And partly open, too, which is suspicious."

"Yes, if old Reuben is still here he would never allow such a thing; he's very particular to have the gate closed," continues Gypsy.

"Then we can take it for granted that those we seek have at least been here."

They enter the grounds. Every foot of the place is familiar to Gypsy, who spent a number of years of her girlhood here, and knows each tree where she used to climb in her venturesome moods.

By degrees they pass through the park, so well known in Virginia, and draw near the manor house. Bob has his wife's arm in his, and he is surprised to feel her tremble.

"Courage, my dear girl. What do you find to fear here—you who have so bravely faced all sorts of dangers with me?" he whispers.

"It affects me strangely—I have believed him dead, and now the thought of seeing him again—oh, I can't express my feelings in words, but don't you know, a cold chill seems to pass over me. It's all foolish, of course, and I'll try to overcome it."

"I am a little afraid you have taken cold, and therefore insist on your drawing that warm shawl more closely about your shoulders, and accept this camphora disc. Look—the house!"

It suddenly looms up before them as they reach an opening in the trees, being on a rise of ground, with the heavens for a background.

Gordon Manor—all Virginia knows of it—was the scene of many strange incidents during the war times. Since then it has been redeemed and made one of the loveliest homes south of Mason and Dixon's line.

The old slave cabins long since gave way to comfortable houses for the hands, some little distance back of the mansion itself. Everything is kept in apple-pie order.

"I see a light," announces Joe, and then as other windows come in range, they find that it is not confined to one place.

Thus they finally reach the house and silently mount the front steps leading to the doors, great, heavy carved affairs a hundred and fifty years old, on one of which is hung a ponderous brass knocker, which Gypsy remembers well, as it was her great delight to raise this and after knocking, run and hide to watch Dinah's amazed face as she found no one there and believed spirit hands had beat the summons.

"Shall we knock?" asks the Senator, as his hand comes in contact with the brass summons server.

"What's the use—the door's open," remarks Bob.

"Very hospitable, these people, with their open gates and doors ajar," mutters Joe.

So, without any invitation, they enter the house. The great wide hall receives them—it is not quite in darkness for a lamp hanging in a swinging bracket relieves their surroundings of the gloom that must otherwise be upon them.

Is Rudolph Gordon here, and, if so, in what position? Would faithful old Reuben recognize and re-

ceive the master whom he once so safely deposited in the family vault near Richmond? Then what of Colonel Cornelius and the shrewd little French lawyer—would they venture to attempt anything desperate in order to accomplish their ends?

These are things that have to be examined into, and it is this object that brings them to Gordon Manor on this October night.

"Let us listen," says Bob, so solemnly that his wife titters, just as if he had been in meeting and invited the others to join him in devotion.

All is not quiet in the house—they hear voices the very first thing, voices that proclaim the presence of those whom they seek.

In the direction of the kitchen can also be heard other sounds, as of weeping and praying—evidently the colored folks belonging to the plantation have received a genuine scare—they have looked upon what they believe is the spirit of the dead master come to haunt the scenes of his life, and it has given them a shock indeed.

As to the others, they are closer at hand.

"Can you lead us to them?" Bob asks, in the ear of his wife, who, without hesitation, replies:

"Easily—they are in the library. Hark! what do they throw furniture about like that for?"

"I should say they were searching for some one," replies Joe, "and mighty angry because he can't be found."

"Undoubtedly your grandfather. Do you know of any secret hiding-place he had, Gypsy?"

"Yes. This house, you know, the main part of it

at least, was built before the Revolution, and there is a secret passage back of the library fireplace, that leads to a little room."

"Any exit from that room?"

"There is a way of reaching the garden."

"Then it seems to me, if we want to catch the old gentleman, cunning enough to return to this house for something valuable that he desires to regain possession of, we ought to place one of our number at that exit."

"Exactly, after we have heard what these men are talking about. Perhaps they may give us a clew that will govern our actions," is the sensible remark Bob ends with.

He turns to his wife.

"Lead on."

Gypsy could walk through the quaint old manor house in the dark, so familiar is she with every nook and cranny, where she has played as a child and hidden from her old black mammy, to whom she was ever a flash of sunshine. She takes them straight to the drawing-room.

"See, the connecting door is ajar—we will go this way—be careful," is her warning, and directly across the parlor she leads her followers.

They see the drift of her plans and realize how sensibly she looks at the matter. Through the partly open connecting doors they can see the whole of the library. Two men come within range of their vision and these are, of course, the ones whom they expect to find here—the French limb of the New York Bar

and his liberal employer, Mrs. Bob's uncle, Colonel Corneel.

These two men appear to be very much exercised. They bustle about the room, overturning furniture and acting as if they had lost something valuable, something that might even have dropped into a mouse's hole, to judge from the manner in which Monsieur Merle gets down on his fat little knees and peers under sofa and bookcase.

All the while they keep up a running comment, and being separated most of the time, these remarks are plainly heard.

"I'm sure there's a secret hiding place somewhere around—it's been known to our family since the Revolution, but bless my soul if I am able to locate it," the fire-eating colonel says.

"So far we have done well—eet will be queer if we cannot bag our game at last. Ze excuse you gave ze major domo of ze plantation zat we were in pursuit of an escaped lunatic who pretended to be ze defunct Rudolph Gordon, seemed to satisfy him. Now, it would only be right if we compel zat same old family servant to show us ze secret hiding-place of zis man."

"Come, that isn't such a bad idea, after all. Perhaps we might have old Reuben put on the rack. He's an obstinate old fool, but knowing his master is dead, he might reveal it, especially if we used a little of the diplomacy you boast of."

"I have only ze one fear."

"What's that, monsieur?"

"Zat zere may be one other opening—you have

seen ze picture of ze old boot zat ze mouse ran in—ze cat try to follow—begar! mouse pop out of ze hole in ze toe and run away while ze cat he is stuck fast half way in. Colonel, we may be ze cat—while we hunt here he goes zere."

"You forget—we have Grubbs outside, as smart a detective as old Virginia ever knew. He will be apt to catch any one escaping. You see, Grubbs——"

Bang goes a door.

Hurried steps are heard—then a man bursts into the library, a forlorn-looking specimen he is, too, with clothes torn and dusty, a face scratched and his hair awry—a man whom they seem to know.

"Why, Grubbs, what's the matter?" cries the colonel.

"*Diable!* he has met ze ghost," grins monsieur.

"You're wrong, sir, I met a cyclone, a whole circus, with a dog under the wagon—tried to stop 'em—they let me down gently, and I've come to report," is Grubbs' reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

The Virginia colonel and Monsieur Merle exchange a glance that means much. They are suddenly brought face to face with defeat.

"Grubbs, do you mean to say that you failed to hold the old man?" cries Corneel.

"I began to try, colonel, but they both came at me like a couple of old wildcats, and pretty soon I was on the defensive, and a minute later on the ground. Reckon my looks bear me out when I say I've passed through an experience," showing his rags and scratches.

"Yes, yes, no doubt of it. You sall be paid, Monsieur Grubbs. Ze great question with us is, where are ze mans who did this sing?"

"Oh! they're gone," coolly.

"Gone!" gasps the colonel.

"Gone!" gurgles the lawyer, throwing up both hands.

"Reckon they're pretty nigh the station now, and the up train's just about due. If you step to the window you may ketch a sight of her," returns Grubbs, who has been paid in advance, and having passed through a bitter experience, is just mean enough by nature to wish some of the bad luck to fall upon his employers.

Both men immediately rush to the window and hear a rumbling sound, undoubtedly made by a train in the distance.

"How could they go without our hearing the carriage?" demanded the colonel.

"Zere is tanbark on ze drive—it makes no noise."

"Quite true, sir," added Grubbs.

"You speak of two—was the other a negro?"

"Yes, a funny old chap—second Uncle Tom, but, thunder and Mars! didn't he have nails," with a sympathetic hand laid on his face.

"That's Old Reuben, curse him," grates Corneel.

"Yes, Old Reuben, bless him," whispers a voice in Bob's ear—Gypsy's voice.

"What can we do?" asks the lawyer.

"After him—it will be strange if a demented old man can outwit two such men."

"Yes, I'll follow him to Richmond—to New York, if he goes there. I know now what he is after—it has all dawned on me suddenly, and I'll live to defeat his plans."

The boastful manner in which this is said excites the blood in Bob's veins, and he can keep silent no longer.

"There's one thing you fail to take into consideration, Colonel Gordon, and that is—myself," he suddenly says, passing through the door and appearing before the astonished trio.

"Who are you?" cries the other, failing to recognize Bob on the spur of the moment.

"It ees ze man zat marry ze heiress—Mister Bob," says Monsieur Merle, in consternation.

"Well, what does he want here?"

"Begar!—zere he is—ask him."

"Easily answered—followed you here to prevent you from injuring old Rudolph—arrived just in time to find you had been baffled by fate. As to my right here, my wife owns this property, and it is you who are intruding—you who ought to be kicked out of the door."

"Sir, I am a Gordon—a Virginian."

"And I'm a Pemberton—a Kentuckian," retorts Bob.

"Should you dare to put your words into execu-

tion there would be murder done, yes, murder, sir. I will depart in peace, since I have no further need of remaining."

Not so Grubbs.

The sharpest detective in all Virginia is feeling very sore over his defeat, and hopes to take it out on some one. He thinks he sees a chance here, not knowing Bob Pemberton.

"Beg pardon, colonel, but we number three."

"What of it?"

"And he's only one. If you give the word, we might have a leetle amusement with Mr. Bob Pemberton, of Kentucky. Strikes me you don't bear him any too much love."

Grubbs thinks he has conceived a great idea, and gives his employer the benefit of it. He is just in a state of mind for something desperate. The colonel, however, notes one fact—as Bob stands there he has his right hand thrown carelessly back of him, so that it rests on his hip. These Kentucky gentlemen generally carry a revolver there, and are astonishingly quick about getting the said weapon into working order.

Bob wants no scene to occur here, with his wife so near at hand. He does what he knows will prevent it.

"Gypsy—Joe—Senator!"

"Great Scott! there's a whole regiment back of him," exclaims Grubbs, as he sees the three persons enter the room.

He loses all desire for war.

Gypsy looks at the colonel, who moves uneasily

under her quizzical gaze and tries to smile, but the attempt is a dismal failure.

"Well, Uncle Cornelius, this is a singular way of meeting. I am surprised and mortified to find my relative turned against me," she says.

He frowns now.

"It's all owing to old Rudolph's unjust will. If he had left me even a portion of his money, I'd have been content, but to cut me, his only living son, off without a dollar, and leave everything to a girl makes me rebel. We Gordons have never been noted for mildness of disposition, you know, and it's only natural for me to make a gallant fight against unjust discrimination."

"Gallant fight—you use such words, you, who have lowered yourself to carry on miserable plotting against a girl—you who at this very minute are planning injury against your own father, miraculously rescued from the grave. A gallant soldier you are, Uncle Cornelius—a coward, rather. You disgrace the name you bear. If I could I would bribe you to change it, go abroad and bury yourself in Paris."

These scathing words would cause most men to hang their heads in shame, but an adventurer of the Virginia colonel's stripe has long since outgrown the small amount of modesty nature endowed him with as a youth, and he simply notes the last phrase of what she says.

"It's only a question of bargain and sale, then. Give me half the estate and I'll go," he declares.

About this time Bob Pemberton arouses to the fact that as the legal husband of the owner of the

Gordon property he should be exercising his rights.

"Senator, open the door wide," he says, with an awful black look on his face.

The colonel looks alarmed.

"What would you do?" he says, quickly.

"Help you out of this place, you wretch."

Gypsy's hand catches hold of Bob's arm.

"Don't, Bob, dear. Remember, he's my uncle."

"Yes, remember, I'm her uncle," sneers the colonel, very unwisely, for Bob's blood is already boiling.

He breaks away from the detaining hand of his wife, he rushes upon Gordon like an avalanche, and if that individual had fallen into the depths of a threshing machine he could not have met with a more disastrous fortune.

He attempts to draw a weapon, but Bob's eye has full swing, and notes the movement, which he paralyzes with a blow from his fist. Then he whirls the adventurer around and pushes him toward the door, reaching which he sends him flying into the hall with a vigorous kick, and then chases him out of the front door.

When he returns Monsieur Merle is making his apologies for being connected with such a sly plotter as the colonel, and declaring that it is only because the other holds a power over him.

They ignore the little Frenchman, and as the detective has already made his escape, Monsieur Merle loses no time in following his example.

Thus our friends are left in possession of the field, though after what they have heard the victory seems

a barren one, since the object of their solicitude has gone.

Can they overtake him. Impossible, for the train is already at the station—they can hear the bell jangling in rude warning.

What then?

Rudolph Gordon has not come to his ancestral home without a purpose, and if he has accomplished this he will not stop long in Richmond.

"Who knows anything about the trains?"

It is Joe who asks this.

"What time have you?" says Bob.

"A quarter after nine."

"Seems to me when I left here before it was on an express—I know the hour was not far from eleven—I reached Richmond and went west a day later."

"Yes, there is an express from the south that stops here on signal about that time," affirms Gypsy —"at least, it used to some time ago."

"That leaves us good time to get back and have some supper at the hotel—I suppose it goes by that name."

"What! Joe, are you really hungry?" cries Bob.

"After that wonderful feast *en route*," laughs Madame Bob.

"I confess to that failing—it is a weakness of mine," and Joe places his hand on his stomach and groans dismally, at which the others laugh.

"When can we leave here?"

Bob looks to his wife while asking this, as he recognizes her right to regulate their movements.

"I will be ready in a few minutes," she replies.

They sit down to be comfortable, and Bob engages his two friends in conversation, feeling that his wife has some motive beyond; but they cannot help watching her.

Gypsy evidently is quite at home here and knows where the queer old recluse, her grandfather, used to keep certain of his valuables. She moves a panel in the wall, showing a cavity beyond, puts in her hand and gropes around, but only to meet with disappointment.

Next she lifts a loose board in the floor at a point where it would never be noticed, but again she finds nothing. For a minute Mrs Bob stands there with a forefinger pressed against her temple, in a thoughtful attitude; then she seems to glance around her as if fearing lest some peeping servant might see her thus revealing the secrets of Squire Gordon.

As if resolved to let no scruple interfere with what appears to be a conscientious duty, she finally goes to an antique cabinet, and by pressing a spring opens a false back disclosing a queer nook, which is empty.

"It is useless; he has taken it all," they hear her say, and each one in turn asks himself what this may mean.

"I am ready to go, gentlemen—to New York—to Europe, if necessary, but he must be found before he loses what he has taken," she says.

"You mean the squire?" asks Bob.

"Yes. Let us go; I do not care to stay longer."

"You are mistress here, my dear. We have plenty of time; would it not be well to go in and see the

servants—to ease their minds—they will, I am sure, be glad to see you. Besides, you can keep them here to watch the property while we pursue this strange phantom, this man whom death even could not keep in the tomb."

"Your advice is good, my dear. Come with me—as my husband they shall know you as their new master," and leaving the Senator and Joe in the library they pass in the direction of the kitchen.

Ere they have been gone a minute Joe suddenly makes a spring, blows out the light, and runs to the window, to his friend's amazement.

"It was the face of that Colonel Corneel. Listen, you can hear him stumbling through the bushes in his hasty retreat. Senator, he had evil intentions at this window; he hates Bob like a tiger-cat," declares Joe Hooker.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HEARD AT THE FIFTH AVENUE.

Bob and his wife soon rejoin the others, having quieted the black servants, who, at sight of Gypsy's beloved face, have shown the utmost enthusiasm, proving what a power she must have had over them in days gone by.

"We are ready to depart now," she says, quietly, for there are tears in her eyes; everything about her awakens memories of the past.

Joe has managed to tell his friend of the face at the

window, and Bob expresses no surprise, for he read the character of Colonel Corneel readily enough, and can easily imagine that this man would when balked in his designs, proceed to extreme measures.

They leave Gordon Manor behind and head for their carriage. The driver greets their coming with some show of enthusiasm, and declares that several parties endeavored to influence him to take them into town, even going so far as to bully him. He chuckles as he tells how he got rid of them by a ruse, and seems to think such faithful service is worthy of extra pay, in which Bob agrees with him, as he contemplates the long walk back to town.

They arrive at the tavern and create a great deal of sensation. Boys and colored girls run this way and that to serve the little company who have dropped into town so strangely, and must leave again by the express.

Presently the aroma of good coffee, and the appetizing odor of fried chicken, permeate every nook and corner of the little hostelry, for if there is one dish upon which Virginia darkies pride themselves it is the way in which they prepare fowls.

Poor Joe can hardly restrain himself, and walks up and down the front porch, groaning at the leaden weight attached to the hands of time.

At last they are summoned to the feast and Joe appeases his terrible hunger. Over the meal they become quite chatty, for there is nothing to drive the blues out of a man so quickly as a cup of good coffee, and it is not everywhere in the back counties of Virginia one can find it.

They have plenty of time for the train, and at length rattle along, bound for Richmond, which capital is reached near midnight.

Plans have been suggested, and they have a pretty fair idea as to what they ought to do. Back again to Ford's, where the balance of the night is spent.

With the morning all are abroad bright and early, for the day promises to be one of considerable importance in their calendar.

Bob bustles off before breakfast to find out what he can at the depot. Perhaps he may get trace of Rudolph Gordon here. The appearance of the old man is striking enough to attract attention, and some one may have noticed him.

So Bob questions the ticket agent—he has been on duty all night, and is not very bright, but fails to remember having waited on any such person as is described to him.

"Would this party be apt to take a sleeper?" he asks, and upon Bob's replying in the affirmative, points out the little den where the agent of the Pullman company has his quarters.

When Bob seeks that place he finds that the man who was on duty during the night has gone for his breakfast, and will not be on duty again until evening. Where does he eat? Around to the depot restaurant Bob hies, and making inquiries, finds his man drinking a cup of coffee.

Bob proceeds to business. He is not a lawyer, but he can ask questions, and presently learns all that the agent knows.

It seems settled that Squire Gordon went away

from Richmond on the late express, and is by this time about in New York, for some one answering his description took a section in the New York sleeper.

As Pemberton leaves the restaurant by one door, he chances to look around, and sees Monsieur Merle entering from another quarter. He can only have one motive in coming here, and that is to see the Pullman agent.

At sight of Bob he starts, and while taking a seat beside the agent at the lunch counter, orders a cup of coffee, just as though that were what he came for.

Bob leaves him to his own devices, and goes back to the hotel. His mind is worried; why does not Gypsy tell him all; what is this secret which she keeps from her husband, a secret in which surely he must be concerned? They will follow old Rudolph; why does he go to Gotham; what has he taken there of which Gypsy seems so anxious; can it be the family jewels or heirlooms. The more he ponders the less satisfaction he receives.

He reaches the hotel and finds the others in the parlor. They wait breakfast for him, as it is probable the news he brings will decide their future movements.

Bob has experienced queer sensations during the last half hour. He is not suspicious by nature, but it seems that Gypsy is hardly treating him fairly in keeping her secret.

He could not be anything but the perfect gentleman, but there is something in his manner that causes her pain. She looks at him wistfully, and once or twice

opens her lips as though she would speak, but something seems to hold her back. Rather early in the honeymoon to have any misunderstanding occur, but their marriage was a peculiar one, since they have hardly known each other long enough to understand the little failings, the defects we all have in our armor. This will wear away, since there are true love and appreciation beneath it.

When they hear what Bob has to say it decides one member of the party, and as this is the sun around which the other planets revolve, they readily agree with what she says.

"It is to New York. The search must go on there —unless you are weary of helping me," and this last is uttered in such a pathetic tone that Bob, as well as the two others at once enter a decided protest; they are delighted to serve her, and would go to the end of the world if necessary, which proves what a hold Mrs. Bob has upon their hearts, and makes good her claim to the title of a witch.

Consequently, they again embark, and are whirled to Washington. Bob, intent on duty, finding he has half an hour's time here, asks numerous questions of the uniformed officials in the depot, and picks up a few scraps of information.

Now they leave for New York, on board the Congressional Limited, and the miles are clicked away behind them as regularly as clockwork. Baltimore is placed in their rear and it is on to Philadelphia.

They have had so much difficulty that they sincerely hope there will be no further delay on the

journey, which is hardly likely, since they are upon one of the best regulated railroads in the country.

Fortune is kind.

In due season they reach the great metropolis, and are taken to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

Bob is at home now. He feels like himself when in New York, where he has long held sway. There are not many points of interest, from the sights of the Bowery to the parks, art museums, and studios that he cannot show a friend.

Bob Pemberton married and settled is a different individual from the bachelor. The old life, with its gay times, has given way to the new one, and he intends to be a model benedict, if devotion to the charming Mrs. Bob will constitute him such.

Another day will perhaps open new vistas in the scenery, and developments may be expected that will cause their business to advance. As it is, all are tired at eleven to-night.

Bob has occasion to go below after all the rest have retired to their rooms. He meets a quiet looking man with whom he shakes hands.

"Got your message, Mr. Pemberton, and I'm ready to pick up your business."

"Glad of it, my dear fellow. I remember how cleverly you did that little affair down in Wall street, when I engaged you. I have even a more delicate work on hand now."

"Two to one there's a woman in it."

Bob laughs.

"Quite right, but it's my wife," he says.

"What! married, Mr. Pemberton?"

"Yes, sudden affair. As you are to go into this business with me, it is only right that you should hear the details. Sit down and listen."

In ten minutes he has given all the salient points of the affair, then a number of questions are asked, which he answers squarely—just like Bob Pemberton does everything.

"That will do, sir. You will hear from me."

"When?"

"Early in the morning. I can do better work in the night. Rely on me. This may seem a hard nut for you to crack, but it is right in the line of my business. Good-night, sir."

So Bob goes up to his room satisfied that his business is being accomplished while he sleeps. Gypsy does not ask questions, and he ventures to say nothing about what has been done, waiting to see what the morning may bring forth.

It brings the secret messenger. Bob is up early and reading the morning paper down in the reading-room, when some one stands beside him; he looks up and receives a shock.

"Good Heaven! it is Rudolph Gordon, alive and in the flesh," is the thought that flashes upon him; and he feels a cold chill chase up and down his spinal column at the bare idea of coming in contact with one who has been in his grave since last they met.

Then he looks more closely at the old gentleman who stands there with rather a quizzical smile upon his face; he seems to suddenly detect a difference somewhere, although unable to say just what it is.

True, a man who has passed through the experience Squire Gordon has, of late, might be excused for appearing unlike himself, but this is not just the true inwardness of the case.

"Well, Mr. Pemberton, would you believe I had found the right party?" asks the old gentleman, with a chuckle at Bob's amazement.

"Bless—my—soul, if it isn't——"

"Craig Marvel—yours to command," with a mock salaam.

"Well, one thing I'm sure of before I ask a question—you've seen the squire."

The other smiles in a peculiar way. Bob even remembers it as one of the Gordon tricks, and is more than ever amazed at the wonderful ingenuity of this clever man.

"Seen him—well, I reckon I've passed through some wonderful adventures since I left you here near midnight. Seen him, Mr. Pemberton—I believe, on my soul, I have saved his life."

"Relate it," returns Bob, quietly; not that he has any reason to believe this man is stretching the truth, for he knows Mr. Craig Marvel is the soul of honor.

During the next thirty minutes he hears one of the oddest, most improbable stories that ever fell from human lips. Rider Haggard was never in it; this man of New York from his own actual *bona fide* experience in his daily and nightly work could give the author of "She" points, and beat him out of the game.

Bob takes it all in; he never doubts a single iota of the story, because he knows the man who is speak-

ing knows him as one who could not be induced to stretch a point; who has seen and heard all he delivers.

When finally Craig says "that's all," Bob reaches out and shakes hands with him, exclaiming:

"You've done nobly, my dear fellow, nobly."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ADVENTURES OF ONE NIGHT.

The next point on the programme is to find Joe and the Senator, and give them an idea as to how the game works.

By the time Craig leaves him, Bob finds that it is the hour for breakfast, so the story must keep until a more convenient season. Under ordinary circumstances they might talk it over, but a breakfast at a hotel means a waiter hovering over one continually.

So they proceed to the dining-room, and break their fast. Gypsy is inclined to be a little sober this morning, as though there are certain things bearing upon her mind. Bob notices this, although he makes no remark. He feels that they are on the verge of some strange development, connected with this case.

Another of the party seems unusually grave, and this is Senator John. As a general thing, he is gay and full of spirits, but this is not the case now. Bob secretly wonders what ails him.

Thus it happens that Joe is really the only live member in the party. He manages to joke considerably, but is considerably taken aback when he sees the peculiar way in which his fun is taken.

"Great Scott! what's come over this party, my dear fellow? It seems like a funeral procession to me," he says, aside, to Bob.

"Wait, I will explain part of it after breakfast," is the reply he receives.

With this he has to be content until the proper time comes, which will now be very soon.

"Come with me to our little parlor," says Bob; "I mean all of you. I have a certain communication to make."

Gypsy's face flashes with sudden intelligence.

"You have been at work already. My dear, what is it all about?"

"I will a tale unfold that must harrow up your soul and chill your blood—isn't that about the way it runs, Senator? Well, here goes."

Then he tells how he happened to think of the detective, and wired him from Philadelphia to come to the Fifth Avenue; that he told the story of the previous night, just before retiring, and received the other's report before breakfast.

He sketches the man's adventures, tells what methods he took to find the man who came from Richmond, and how he believed he finally had him located in a certain house.

"The great trouble was to find out whether he was the right party. Craig is a peculiar fellow—

makes a specialty of disguises—can imitate any man or woman to a dot—beats any actor I ever saw.

"Well, he got a look at Rudolph Gordon leaving the house; went to his rooms, and presently appeared on the scene a good counterpart of the old gentleman.

"He carries skeleton keys, and easily entered the rooms from which the other came. The house was a tenement of French flats and seemed to have numerous lodgers. Once inside Craig says he was astonished to see the style of things, and made up his mind this flat must have been furnished to bring a good, round rental, for luxurious chairs, sofas, rich curtains, and handsome pictures abounded.

"Craig is business from the start, and I may as well say right here an athlete of no mean ability. He takes all this in at a glance, and then, with a grunt, goes to work searching."

At this Gypsy starts and her bright eyes are fastened eagerly on her husband's face.

"Did he find it?" she murmurs, and Bob, smiling fondly at her, shakes his head in the negative.

"You shall hear all, my dear, and judge of this wonderful man's ability," he says.

"I beg pardon—please proceed."

"He begins to rummage, and I reckon it takes your modern detective to conduct a search without so disturbing things as to excite suspicion. No time is wasted—he knows just where to look, and skips from place to place.

"In the midst of his search the bogus Rudolph hears a deep sigh, and looks up to see a lady there regarding him anxiously."

"Could you describe her, Bob?"

It is Senator John who asks this question, and as the attention of the other is directed toward him, he realizes, for the first time, that John Archer is unusually interested. He sits there with both hands grasping the arms of his chair, and gazing steadfastly into Bob's face. Indeed, the other cannot remember having ever seen his friend so much in earnest. Gypsy looks at him in a troubled way.

"Well, Craig did not waste much time in describing the lady. He said she was middle-aged but remarkably handsome. She seemed to be watching him as though she believed him to be Rudolph Gordon and yet feared for his sanity.

"When she spoke she used a soothing tone as though she would quiet him.

'What did she call him?" asks Senator John.

" 'Father,' Craig said."

John Archer turns his face away; a band happens to be passing the square, and it gives him an excuse to go to the window, though he only remains a minute or so, just long enough to compose his features.

"Craig hardly knows what to say, and begins to mutter something, when the lady, darting forward, clutches his arm, and looking in his face, shrieks and swoons.

"That is enough to demoralize most men; but this friend of mine is used to all manner of difficulties, and he considers this only an incident. Without showing any alarm, he gently raises the lady in his

arms and places her in an easy-chair, after which he goes on with his search.

"Nothing of consequence rewards him, so that he sees no reason for remaining. It happens, however, that his adventures have only begun.

"As he turns toward the door to go, he discovers other visitors. Three men, their faces covered by masks, have entered. They spread out like a fan—and his retreat is utterly cut off.

"They advance from all sides, thinking they have the old man demoralized. To their utter amazement he squares off, as might a Corbett, and meets them eagerly.

"I would give fifty dollars to be able to see that little circus. If you knew Craig you'd appreciate the situation. I said he was something of an athlete; the fact is, he has a bushel of medals which he has won as a member of our athletic club, for all-round athletics. As a boxer I never met his equal; he has punished me many a time."

"The brute," murmurs Mrs. Bob, who, nevertheless, seems decidedly interested in the recital.

"He gave them the benefit of his knowledge, and practiced all his scientific moves upon them, no doubt greatly to their edification. Craig passed over the scene very lightly, but it must have been a menagerie. He simply said he had a little amusement—that one fellow picked himself up in the hall and vamosed—a second he had the pleasure of kicking down the stairs, when upon returning to demolish the small chap he found him hanging out of the window to the fire-escape, down which he went with a

rush when the mock Rudolph Gordon made for him."

Joe is shaking with laughter.

"That is superb—never heard of a better scene off the boards. Shall jot it down—know a playwriter who could make a great hit with it. Was that all, Bob, my boy?"

"All? Not by a long shot. Didn't I say Craig had met with enough adventures in an hour to fill the ordinary novel?

"You see, when he had cleared the field in this way Graig is a little out of breath. He thinks he might as well sit down and rest a minute before leaving such luxurious apartments. Sitting there, and getting his second wind, his eyes fall upon the face of the lady who has not yet come out of her swoon. He speculates regarding her identity—who is she, living thus apparently alone in such grand style—what relation does she bear to old Squire Gordon to call him 'father?' "

"Father!" murmurs Gypsy, whose face looks a little pale—"oh! what if all that dreadful woman said to me could be true."

Bob glances, not at his wife, but in the direction of the Senator. It seems that he is growing more and more interested in John Archer, as by degrees the vail is being raised, and he sees things in a new light. The Senator's countenance is working with an emotion even his powerful will cannot control; he listens eagerly, almost holding his breath, and yet endeavors to appear composed—quite at his ease.

This is a new complication. Up to within the last hour Bob never suspected that John Archer has en-

tered this game with any other motive in view than of philanthropy—assisting a friend. Now the scales begin to fall from his eyes, and he sees as through a glass darkly.

"Craig recovers his wind, in sporting parlance—trick I've fallen into, my dear, from athletic association—and is thinking of again starting to leave the room, when, as he rises from the chair, he faces the genuine Gordon entering.

"Phew!" exclaims the Senator.

"Great guns! what a climax," says Joe.

"Gentlemen—and ladies, imagine the situation. Two Richmonds in the field. It happens that only a night or so ago Craig attended a Shakespearian play—you've all seen it. 'Two Dromios,' as acted by two of our brightest stars. Its odd situations are fresh in his mind, and like a flash it comes over him that here is an excellent chance to bring out some of the points in the play. He conceives the notion of mimicing the old man believing it is his best hold.

"When Gordon catches sight of what seems to be his double he starts back as if amazed—so does Craig. Then Rudolph advances a pace, and raising an arm shakes his fist at the other—ditto Craig, at Rudolph. This seems to stagger the old man, for he throws up both hands in alarm, and Craig follows the example.

"It is too much—this last straw about breaks the camel's back, and the old gentleman beats a hasty retreat, crying that he had 'em again, he was sure he felt the symptoms coming on."

At this Joe snickers; he is the only one whose interest is purely of a friendly nature, and he never

could let a joke large or small pass him by unnoticed.

"Of course Craig supposed his adventures were at an end, although he began to believe he was fated to be confronted by the whole city in detachments.

"This time he manages to leave the flat, and is descending the stairs, when a door that has been ajar suddenly opened and before he can say Jack Robinson a hand catches him by the arm, a woman's hand, too, and he is unceremoniously drawn into a room."

"Oh! Bob," cries his wife, blushing like a rose.

"Well, you see, Craig is as strong as an athlete, but he is also something of an Adonis, and even Samson was powerless in the hands of his Delilah, you remember.

"Craig has in that one glimpse seen that the woman is beautiful in face and charming in figure; naturally he is not capable of making the desperate resistance that would have followed had she been ugly.

Bob looks around, Gypsy pouts and frowns, the Senator nods in a comprehensive way, while Joe says, frankly:

"Certainly not—human nature all around. Can't help it, you know. There is planted in our heart a love for the beautiful and a dislike for what is ugly," and he looks in a beaming way at Gypsy—a look that makes her feel satisfied with his explanation.

"When Craig described this enchantress to me I knew another one of the characters in our little drama had entered by R. C., which means right centre, and advanced upon the stage, as she has on many a mimic one, for he pictured her as plain as day, the vengeful actress, Josephine Armitage."

BOOK FOUR.

The Widow of the Alhambra Flats.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERIOUS TENANT OF THE ALHAMBRA FLATS.

Bob has had a little stage training himself, and knows when to halt after reaching a point which might be termed a crisis. So he waits to see what effect his announcement will have upon the others.

The Senator looks surprised; Joe, who has heard about the actress, and is not a stranger to her, moves uneasily in his seat at mention of her name, while Gypsy shows her woman's feeling of contempt toward one who had made out to be her rival, by saying:

"Poor Mr. Craig," and in such a sympathetic manner that Bob is compelled to grin before he resumes his narrative.

"When Craig finds himself face to face with Josephine, his first thought is that she must, in some way, be concerned in the game—you see, these men of his line are uncommonly bright, and can get at the kernel inside a shell much sooner than most of us.

"She takes him for Rudolph Gordon, that is evident, and believes she has an old man to twist around her finger. He plays his part well, and does not by any sign betray his double dealing.

"Josephine Armitage is connected by the ties of kinship with the Gordons, through Gypsy's father, whose sister married an Armitage—am I right, dear?"

"Yes, yes," she replies, eagerly, her eyes glued upon his face, and no one notices that another member of the party nods his head in the affirmative and mutters low words to himself.

"She has not lost a particle of the venom she feels toward Gypsy, and it is with this spirit of hatred in her heart that she works now—that she lays her plans to capture the old man.

"I shall not try to repeat her words; she desires Rudolph Gordon to sign a paper, and Craig makes out to consent very reluctantly. Of course, no matter what the document might be it could have no value, as the signature he put upon it is as much like Squire Gordon's spider chirography as black resembles white.

"She appears satisfied, and kisses the old man, as might a loving daughter, and shows him to the door, through which Craig departs, chuckling mightily over this last strange adventure."

"Was that all?" asks Joe.

"Not quite. He had one more little affair, and it caused him some annoyance.

"As he is leaving the building, having accomplished all he set out to perform, he suddenly hears a voice exclaim:

"Zat is ze man—arrest him!"

"Craig squares off, but discovering that it is a bluecoat who drops a heavy hand on his shoulder, he

thinks discretion the better part of valor, and signifies his willingness to accompany him to the station.

"Lawyer Merle trots along at their heels to prefer charges of assault and battery, which his appearance amply proves, for he did not reach the ground from that window without some bruises. Of course he makes a fictitious case out of it, and the captain in charge pretends to commit the old prisoner, for Craig has already slyly whispered his name to him.

"When Monsieur Merle has gone, of course Craig, after telling his story to the police captain, is at liberty to depart, and his string of adventures for the night are done. Now, what do you think of what he has picked up?"

Joe says, enthusiastically, "Wonderful." The Senator remarks that it is a good night's work, while Mrs. Bob claps her hands and cries "bravo."

Thus they stamp their approval upon it, and Bob is satisfied that he has done the right thing.

"I must see the lady who swooned, the lady who lives in those elegant rooms, who was so beautiful, and yet so sad," says Gypsy, in low voice, her mood changing again.

"You think you know her?" asks the Senator, in a careless way, looking toward the window, through which still floats the music of the band in the square.

"No—yes—that is, strange thoughts, suspicions, if you will, have arisen in my mind of late. God alone knows whether they be true or not, though I fervently pray I may find them so," she replies, shaken with secret emotion.

"Amen," says the Senator, solemnly.

She looks at him in wonder, and Bob moves uneasily, the feeling of suspicion with regard to his friend arising once more.

"I am deeply interested—more than I can remember ever being in any case before—both on Bob's account and your own," the Senator deems it his duty to explain, and they accept it, Gypsy without again thinking it strange, though her husband reserves his suspicions.

"Did he give you the address, Bob?" asks Joe.

"Certainly; a fine fellow he would be not to do such a thing. There it is on an old envelope; make a note of it."

As Bob produces the paper, the others bend forward to read it. Senator John instantly has his notebook and pencil out.

"Eager to assist a friend," is Bob's mental comment, "but, all the same, I have my thoughts about the matter, and shall await developments."

"I wonder what became of grandfather after he fled from his counterpart," Gypsy says.

"O! I reckon he came back again, after a time, when he found he was in his right mind. If he should not turn up we'll make the rounds of the hospitals and look for an old gentleman suffering from an attack of delirium tremens."

"Poor grandfather. Perhaps, after all, it would have been better had he remained in his grave. It is a terrible thing to have such a determined nature that one will ever fight against the decrees of fate, and return from the tomb," and in this no one ventures to differ with her.

"What is our programme?"

They all look toward Bob, as though, in this emergency, he is the recognized leader, and must plan for the general good. So he bestirs himself to grasp the situation and evolves an idea.

"Since they know Squire Gordon goes to the French flats, and Monsieur Merle will not be apt to give up the fight, we must expect more trouble with them and be prepared. You desire to meet your grandfather face to face, Mrs. Bob?"

"I do," she says, firmly, "and at that place where the lady, who is beautiful yet sad, seems to live. When may we go? I am very anxious."

"At once," says the Senator, decisively.

"Thank you, Senator John. I am sure of one good friend, at any rate, who has my interests at heart," at which Bob smiles, as he can well afford to, knowing that she adores him.

"I heartily concur in that proposition," he says, "and move that we start immediately."

"A carriage?" asks Joe.

"Yes, if you please. Gypsy, where are your wraps —the air is chilly?"

As Joe hurries off on his errand and the Senator steps over to his room to get his fall overcoat, Bob looks his wife in the face, looks at her with a smile and kindly expression.

"My dear girl, you have something to tell me a little later on—not now. I can even give a fair guess as to its nature, knowing some of the secrets of your house, for your grandfather, when he believed himself to be dying, took me into his confidence."

"Oh, Bob——"

"Never mind. All I want to say is, trust me above every one in the world. You belong to me; your interests are mine, and I desire with all my heart that you succeed."

"Oh, Bob, I——"

"No, no, not a word now. Let me help you on with your wraps, and we will soon know what draws Rudolph Gordon to one whom he hated up to the time of his supposed death."

"What if it should be, Bob. I am all of a tremble. I never felt so in all my life. I have dreamed of some such thing, but never dared think of it in my waking hours."

"Say no more, my dear wife, until we learn the truth. I would advise you not to expect too much, for there might be a grievous disappointment before you."

"Bob, your advice is sound. I will try to moderate my expectations, and let them go back to what they were before—a desire to simply save my grandfather from the plots and schemes of his unnatural son, Colonel Cornelius."

They are now ready to leave the hotel. Gypsy seems quite self-possessed, as though she has mastered her weakness, and Bob feels doubly proud to know he has a wife who can thus control emotions that as a general thing get the better of womenkind.

Joe returns.

"Carriage in waiting—fine covered vehicle. Just hold us all—that is, if you wish us to go along."

"Wouldn't have it otherwise," says Gypsy, quickly, while her husband declares:

"You remember what I told you, Joe; we're all in this business, and whatever may come of it there are to be secrets from no one. You must know all. Come, we will go."

Entering the vehicle, they are driven away, and Bob having given the direction he received from his friend Craig does not concern himself any more about it, beyond repeating the same to the experienced and knowing Jehu who holds the ribbons. New York hack drivers are supposed to have the whole map of the great city before their mind's eye at any and all times, so there can be no problem of routes too deep for their solving.

Bob desires to keep his wife from worrying too much over the possible developments that may occur, and to this end he devotes his whole energies. When he goes into a thing heart and soul, he is pretty sure to get there, and before they have been in the vehicle five minutes he makes some remark that sets Gypsy laughing and breaks the reserve.

Joe catches the spirit, and adds his mite, so that it is not long before they seem to be quite a merry company.

The carriage stops with a jerk alongside the curb and Bob looks out.

"Number 271—the Alhambra flats—why, we're here, friends."

"So soon!" cries Joe.

Gypsy sinks back with a sigh.

"Courage," whispers the voice of the man she

loves—it thrills her through and through, and she immediately braces up, and becomes her brave self again.

Bob assists her from the vehicle, and they stand before the imposing building looking up.

"And this is the place where she lives," is the thought of Gypsy.

"Here Craig had his wonderful adventures," says Joe to himself.

The Senator has been unusually solemn—more than once they have endeavored to make him smile, but the attempt produces such poor results that they are ready to let it drop.

Following Bob, they enter the great door and meet the janitor.

"We desire to see the lady in Flat Thirteen."

"Mrs. Wade—sorry, sir, she's gone," is the stunning answer received.

"Gone—moved away? and all her furniture?"

"Bless you, she rented the flat furnished."

"Then who can tell us where to look for her?" cries Gypsy, in a despairing tone.

"Perhaps I may be of assistance, lady," says another voice just behind them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BOB FINDS—A FATHER-IN-LAW.

They turn around to discover near by a man whose features are of a pronounced Jewish cast. He seems to regard them with a smile, and has evidently heard all that has been said, though they never dreamed any one was within hearing distance.

Bob steps toward him with a frown; his first thought is that this man represents some invention of the enemy to circumvent them—that he may even be concerned in the disappearance of the tenant of the French flat.

Hence it is his intention to demolish him with a look, to make him understand as it were, that everything is known. With this idea in view, he faces the other, receives a bland smile, and hears him say:

"Well, Bob, old fellow, they got a little ahead of you this time, eh?"

"Great Scott! it's Craig himself," ejaculates Bob, almost floored by the news.

"Who else should it be, my dear man?" returns the dandified Israelite, as he twirls a pair of eyeglasses in his fingers a la Lord Beaconsfield.

"This is an immense surprise."

"Pleasure, too, let us hope."

"Indeed it is. Gypsy, my dear, this is my old friend, Craig—and this is Mrs. Bob."

"Delighted to meet one I have heard so much of,

and who succeeded in carrying off my bachelor friend, Bob Pemberton."

"Oh!" she says, as she gives him her hand, "it was Bob who did all the carrying—didn't you, sir?"

"And the dearest load I ever had thrust upon me—never will forget that forest fire while I have life. But, Craig, you said something, just now, whether in joke or earnest, that concerns us."

"I meant it."

"You know this lady of the French flats had departed from here?"

"Yes, and that you would be coming to see her, so I waited patiently about till Mary did appear, as the old rhyme has it."

"Bob introduce me to your friend."

"Beg pardon, Joe," and both Hooker and the Senator are soon shaking hands cordially with the other.

It might be noticed—Bob sees it—that Craig glances keenly from under his heavy eyebrows at the Senator, as though he has an especial interest in him, and as Bob entertains certain faintly defined suspicions himself, he makes a mental note of this fact for future reference.

"Tell us what you know of this flitting, Craig."

The man whose business it is to look after others and who has given his especial attention to this case, leans against the wall—the janitor has been called away, so they are alone, the little company whose interest is involved in this matter.

"I shall only give the facts; it does not pay to

speak of the many calculations I indulged in, or the way in which I managed to learn certain things.

"The lady of whom I told you left this house at eight o'clock this morning. A wagon carried her trunks and boxes. On the seat of that wagon were two individuals, the driver and his helper. I chanced to be that assistant."

"Good for you," comments Bob.

"In this way I learned just where she went, spoke to her, and even stopped with the driver to arrange the trunks and open the boxes. When you are ready to go I'll lead you to the new apartment house which she now occupies."

"And the old gentleman?"

"Is, I believe, with her. He seems considerably toned down by his night's experience, and if I were asked my opinion, I would say he is near the point of a relapse."

Mrs. Bob shivers at his words.

"Poor grandfather! his life has been a strange and hard one; and the same fate seems bound to pursue him to the end. Perhaps there may be something of retribution about it."

Bob does not forget the words; he has himself fancied more than once about the same thing.

"What about Colonel Corneel?"

Craig smiles.

"They got over their scare of last night, and have been at work ever since, but you know that class of men do more at night than when the sun shines, so we hardly need fear them. I am more concerned about a woman's wiles."

"Meaning Josephine Armitage."

"Yes, she managed that little affair of last night so remarkably well that I give her credit for great engineering ability. If she has by any means found out the truth with regard to the game I played, we'll see more of her before a great while."

"She is a strange woman, and I am sorry she has conceived such a hatred toward me. It is one of the shadows on my life."

Bob assumes the guidance of the party.

"Do you want to go there now, Gypsy?"

"Yes—no. I am only anxious to do the right thing—would I could tell what was for the best."

A little more conversation and our friends return to the hotel, baffled, it is true, for the present, but with strong hopes, based on a good foundation, that they will eventually succeed.

All adjourn to the private parlor that is a portion of Bob's elegant suite of rooms.

On the way, Pemberton is drawn aside by the Senator, whose face has a look of eagerness upon it Bob cannot remember ever seeing before.

"I wish to see you alone, my boy. I have something of immense importance to communicate. Arrange it," says the Senator, and Bob knows another step has been taken in the game that will, in all probability, advance their cause.

"I will excuse myself—wait here."

He begs his wife to entertain the gentlemen for a brief time as he has some business below, and in a brief time joins the Senator.

"Now I am at your service, my dear man."

"Good—Bob, has it ever struck you that I might have a history back of all these years in Congress and traveling?"

"Jove! is this news about yourself, Senator—I thought——" and Bob stops, fearing that he has come very near stepping on dangerous ground.

"You supposed it concerned the business of the hour—well, you are right—it does both, for they are connected."

"Ah!" and Bob nods knowingly.

"I desire to open to your gaze, my boy, a heart that has been shut up for fifteen years and more. I have laughed and been a jovial fellow; but under it all carried a load of misery few men would be able to uphold."

"Fifteen years—yes, go on," mutters Bob, mentally calculating, "she could have been three years old, then."

"Many things have been kept in profound secrecy for these years. I myself have believed certain facts that have turned out fallacies. Bob, you never even knew that once I was married."

"Well, you told me recently. I might have guessed the fact by a dozen different things."

"Yes, I had a happy home once—happy in spite of the fact that the father of my wife hated me like one might a mad dog, happy until a serpent entered my Eden, and destroyed it, making me a wanderer, and for a year a sceptic with regard to human nature; but, thank God, I overcame this."

"I should say so," remarks Bob, who finds it hard

to believe this gentle-mannered man could ever have doubted and been cynical.

"Had not a new light dawned upon me I should have kept my secret always, and carried it to the grave with me. In a strange way I was brought to a point where I looked upon a face that thrilled me through and through; it was so like that of my lost Ruth, whom I had been led to believe was dead. The name attracted my attention first—then that face. Bob, there came a sudden suspicion—an inspiration, that I had been deceived, basely hoodwinked by that vengeful old man—that I was gazing on the countenance of one who belonged to me—my daughter!"

He stops a short minute, not for effect, but because emotion overpowers him.

"I said nothing, my boy, but did a powerful amount of thinking. Time passed. My quiet investigation began to bear fruit. Here I picked up a crumb, and it fitted a niche—there I made a little discovery and it was just what I wanted. Bob, there is no longer a doubt that I have found my own," joyfully.

"Good Heaven, Senator!"

"What is it, my dear boy?"

"You can only refer to one being."

"Estelle—my lost darling—my child."

"Listen—you were my friend—I have confided in you as such, but that is ended."

"Why, Bob, surely I can see no reason ——"

"Reason—man alive, who ever heard of a young husband confiding—ha, ha!—his secrets to—his

father-in-law? Senator—you know I am joking. From my heart, I can truly say Heaven be praised!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

The two men who have so long been friends, and are now united by even a stronger bond, shake hands, as it were, to cement the new ties, and such a grasp with persons of their character means volumes.

"You have revealed a strange matter, John."

"But you have not heard all, my boy."

"Ah! there is more to tell—you have found your long-lost daughter—you suspect that this beautful, sad lady of the Alhambra flats——"

"Is my wife."

"That would indeed be strange. She goes to the world as Mrs. Wade."

"What's in a name?"

"That reminds me—my wife was Estelle Gordon—how could she be so if your child?"

"Her name is Estelle Gordon Archer, though she evidently never heard the last part of it."

"Strange."

"Not at all. The old man hated me so thoroughly that my name was poison to him. How it was all done is a deep mystery to me, but one I mean to solve

now to the bitter end. The results of his scheming are very evident; each of them has been led to believe the other dead, while I have lived all these years fully convinced that fate overtook my wife while running away from me with another man, and my innocent child with them," groaning. "I told you to a picnic, but it was more than that—she apparently fled from me."

"The old heathen," mutters Bob, indignantly.

"You can see for yourself how far and relentlessly the Gordon pride carried him. He has wrecked my life, but thank Heaven, I have learned to forgive even my worst enemy. I have no time to hate, but, now that the opportunity has come, must bend every energy to the task of learning the truth."

"Good for you, Senator, and I am with you, heart and soul. What news for Mrs. Bob. She will love you even as I have done."

"Do you think so?" he asks, tenderly; "imagine the life I have led, Bob; a man who once knows the tender love ties of home, and has everything snatched from his grasp, is to be pitied indeed."

"You are right, my friend. But, tell me, what reason have you for thinking that this lady can be your wife?"

"Hark, then. In the first place your friend described her as a lady of middle age, with gray hair, beautiful and sad. Ruth was lovely as a girl, and surely if this be my lost wife, she has had enough to make her sad.

"Go a step farther—the old man had but two children, and Cornelius turned out such a scamp that he

washed his hands of him altogether. Gypsy can tell you that for years he has been in the habit of taking periodical trips to New York. She believed it to be on business, but we know it was to see his daughter, who lived there.

"There is no other person on earth in whom Rudolph Gordon could take an interest but her. I am almost positive of it, and only require one look at the lady of the Alhambra."

"You shall have it. Perhaps, then, you could hazard a guess with regard to another thing."

"What is it?"

"The old man carries something that Colonel Corneel desires to get possession of very much—can this be family treasures, valuable gems or papers?"

"Not knowing the peculiarities of Squire Gordon for the last fifteen years, I cannot positively say, and only guess. I believe he has a packet of papers relating to this affair of mine—of Ruth's. Many things point to it. You remember the two men went to Gordon Manor to look for it. Perhaps they believe his last will and testament may be among these papers, and this destroyed would leave Colonel Corneel the heir by some old will."

"Yes, and you remember that even Gypsy was anxious to find something when we were at the Gordon Manor; she searched three separate hiding-places in vain and was dreadfully disappointed at not finding it."

"I remember every instance, for though outwardly calm, I was secretly trembling in every nerve as she looked in vain. She must have understood for a long

time that when her grandfather died and she had access to his papers, there would be revealed some secret which affected the past, for she has apparently had reason to believe there is a mystery hanging over her life."

"When shall we tell my wife?"

The Senator starts.

"I hardly know. I long to clasp her in my arms, and yet, do you understand, fear lest he may have managed, in some insidious way, to have poisoned her ears against me."

"That fear, I am sure, is groundless. I will sound Gypsy and learn all."

"Thanks, my dear boy, from my heart; and if all is well, call me in. Together we will be better fitted to discover whether the sad lady of the Alhambra flats is the one so dear to us."

"Have you then forgiven her?"

"Long, long ago; but of late I have been wondering whether, after all, there was anything to forgive."

"What?"

"I mean this—that if Rudolph Gordon was so shrewd as to deceive me into the belief that both of my darlings were dead, it would have been an easy matter for him to have made it appear that Ruth had run away with another. This suspicion has been growing into a conviction, and when her story, if it so be that this is my wife, is told, I firmly believe we shall find that the wretched father to have been at the bottom of it all."

Bob is deeply impressed with what the Senator has told him, and when he leaves that worthy it is to go

at once to where his wife may be seen. He finds his friend just making his adieu, and has a chance to say good-night. Joe accompanies the gentlemen down stairs. Perhaps his intuitive faculties tell him that Bob and his wife may have something to talk over together. Joe has had some acquaintance among married folks, and knows considerable about their ways.

At any rate, it suits Bob exactly. He has upon his mind the matter which constituted the burden of his recent conversation with John Archer, and recognizes in this a Heaven-sent opportunity to bring matters to a focus.

So he gently seats his wife in a chair, somewhat to her surprise, and faces her.

"I want to speak on a serious matter, my dear, but don't get alarmed. I trust it is something that will bring you great happiness."

"Bob—is it about her?" she says, in a low voice, as if actually frightened.

"Indirectly—yes. You have been keeping something from me, my dear."

"Yes, yes, but I meant——"

"I know you did, and I made up my mind to await your own good time, but certain circumstances have arisen which make it necessary that I should speak now. That secret concerns your parentage."

"Yes," faintly.

"You have for some time believed yourself to be the daughter of one whose maiden name was Armitage, and who married a son of Rudolph Gordon, long since dead."

"Such was my firm belief, until recently."

"You even inherited property left by this aunt of Josephine Armitage."

"If it proves, as I now suspect, she shall have every penny of it."

"I cannot understand how it could happen, but that has really nothing to do with what is now before us. You suspect—I *know* that you are not the child of this aunt of Josephine—that not a drop of the Armitage blood flows in your veins."

She gives a cry, but says nothing, only sitting there with such a wistful look on her white face that Bob takes compassion upon her and hastens.

"You are a Gordon, and yet you have no right to that name; it has been given to you by your grandfather, who hated the name of your father."

"My father—who——"

"Have patience. Your mother was a daughter of the strange, vindictive old squire—Ruth Gordon."

"Ruth—what a coincidence," she murmurs, but does not explain her meaning.

"She married the man she loved, and was sent from home by her father. Several years passed by, and the squire, whose hatred for your father was intense, learning how happy they were, laid plans to separate them forever. He succeeded only too well."

"Oh! and I, in my blind trust, even loved that old man who ruined the lives of my parents."

She seems to feel this more than anything else, and shows something of anger, for Gypsy has a temper of her own, though she curbs it well.

"My dear wife, another fact you must see from

what I have told you—your are a Gordon on your mother's side."

"Then my name? Oh, Bob, what a delicious state of uncertainty—see, I am trembling in suspense concerning it. Tell me—is it Smith?"

"No—you will have to guess again," smiling.

"Then Jones."

"We will have to let those two great families pass by, since you do not belong to either."

"You provoking man! I am unable to guess—at least tell me the first letter."

"Say A."

"Allen—Andrews—Aiken—Archer——"

"Yes."

"Estelle Gordon Archer. I saw that name once on some paper, by accident, and when I went to look for it again grandfather had hidden it away. It is not—so—very odd. Somehow, I like it."

Then she gives a sudden start.

"Why, Bob, don't you see, that's the name of our friend, the Senator."

"You are quite right, my dear. Be calm. I have some very important intelligence to communicate now."

"Yes, yes, Bob—support me, there's a good man. I feel, don't you know, as though I might faint. These things are very sudden and overpowering."

"Nonsense, my dear girl, be yourself—that means brave and true. What I have to say is right to the point. John Archer, whom I have long loved as though he were an elder brother, gentle, kind, and affectionate, John Archer is the man."

"My father?"

"Without a doubt. I have just come from him—we have had a long talk and considered the matter on every side. Let me tell his story."

He goes on.

By degrees all is known, and Gypsy learns that not only has she found a father, but that there is a chance of a mother being restored to her.

"It is almost too good, Bob—my cup is running over with gladness. Is he in the hotel? Oh, send for him, bring him to me, my poor, long-suffering father," she says, with deep emotion.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRAIG HAS IT ALL ARRANGED.

So they burst into the little parlor. Gypsy is there, steadying herself against a chair; she and the Senator gaze upon each other with eager eyes, while practical Bob closes and locks the door.

Contrary to all custom, under similar conditions, not a word is said. Senator John advances a step, and looks unutterable things. Bob's wife, unable to longer control her natural feelings, springs forward and is caught in a parent's arms.

John Archer, holding his child thus, close to his heart, looks up as he says, reverently:

"I thank Heaven for this great blessing. It is more than I deserve."

The explanations are short, of course, for there is no time to spare, and at some future date they can enter more fully into them.

While they are still talking, behold! a knock, a gentle summons announces a visitor without. Bob opens the door.

"Ah! you, Joe."

Hooker enters.

"I have brought a friend with me," he says.

Bob frowns; having just got rid of one outsider, are they to have another tacked on them? He hardly vouchsafes a glance at the party until he hears his wife give a silvery laugh.

"How are you again, Mr. Craig?" she says.

"What!" ejaculates Bob, and then he turns his attention toward the party in question, and sees a very sanctimonious looking person, with a droll twinkle in his eyes; the lid of the left one having a slight droop to it—and it was this mark which betrayed him to the sharp eyes of Gypsy.

Finding his identity no longer a secret, Craig laughs as he says:

"No use trying to hide when a lady's eyes are on one. Always found that to be the case—fight shy of 'em whenever I can."

"We have some news for you, my dear fellow. This stout gentleman whom you have met before, and whom you know as Senator John Archer——"

"Let me tell it, Bob," breaks in his wife.

"What if I said I already knew?" grins Craig.

"The deuce you say!" exclaims his friend.

"Well, there's enough resemblance, anyhow."

"Bob, I do believe he has guessed it," from Gypsy, in some little excitement.

"Resemblance—what do you mean, Craig?"

"She looks like her pa—noticed it as soon as I saw 'em—remember I asked you, Bob, if they were related, and you said emphatically no. Hadn't got on to things then, eh? Know more now than ever before in your life, I reckon."

The Senator laughs, and all join in, even Bob, on whom the joke falls.

"Yes, I admit the corn this time, ladies and gentlemen. Craig is as shrewd as a Vidocq over in Paris, a man who never let a case puzzle him long. But, come, business demands our attention. I am sure Craig is here because the grand climax is near at hand when we will lift the vail that screens the end.

He looks eagerly at the man who deals in mystery, and Craigs nods affirmatively.

"This is my mission, gentlemen—ladies. First of all I called upon the sad lady who lived at the Alhambra—was a city directory man this time, with book and bottle of ink, and a dozen questions. Made my way into her parlor, and occupied the best chair with an assurance none of Trow's men could beat, I'm positive.

"Found the old gentleman was in the next room reading—had a glimpse of him—asked who he was, and learned that he was a visitor, whose name was not necessary as a feature of the directory; when she went in to ask him a question, used my ears, and heard her call him 'father.'"

At this Senator John and Bob exchange a very significant glance, while Gypsy exclaims:

"Oh! my mother!" as though the one wish of her heart might be to greet this long-lost relative.

"I made other investigations—don't pay to go into particulars now—results what you want, and results we had sure enough.

"Found that the colonel and that cunning old French lawyer had not given up the game, but were hanging around still, with some plot in their heads whereby they might accomplish their end.

"Made up my mind I would learn just what that scheme was, and when I set to work on anything like this, trifles don't stop me.

"All is plain sailing now, and if we can only carry out the line I've laid down, before many hours slip by we'll have it as we wish.

"The old gentleman has one weakness—he is very fond of music. I should imagine that he must have had all manner of musical instruments at Gordon Manor when he was alive—I mean before his supposed death and interment," with a look at Gypsy, who hastens to say:

"What you remark is the exact truth. We had a piano, organ, harp, violin, flute, banjo, guitar, and numerous foreign instruments which grandfather picked up in Spain, Sweden, India, China and Persia —strange and uncouth some of them, but capable of making weird music. It was his one hobby—that collection, and though not a musician himself, he took great pleasure is hearing others play."

"Just so. I could hazard a guess that far myself.

At any rate, he has consented to come out of his shell for one night and attend the opera."

"The opera!" exclaims Bob's wife.

"Yes—his daughter will accompany him. This I learned through overhearing a conversation between this Monsieur Merle and his employer, the unnatural son of the old man; they never dreaming that strange ears took it all in.

"If we can work things properly now, there will be a climax at the theatre, and the end must come as you suggest, in a dramatic way, in the very home of the drama."

"Craig, tell us what to do. We are ready and anxious to obey orders. This affair had better be settled forever before another morning dawns. I am afraid the roses are leaving my wife's cheeks through anxiety, and I cannot afford that."

"If you will promise me, one and all, to do just as I say, I will endeavor to bring about the crisis. Never mind my way—it is a secret as yet, but I can see how success is almost sure."

Bob looks around from face to face.

"I believe I speak the mind of all when I say to you, my dear fellow, go ahead. We are all aiming in one direction, and that is to discover the truth with regard to this mysterious Mrs. Wade, and to secure Squire Gordon, so that he may not be injured by those who even plot against his life. Yes, take charge, General Craig, order us as you will, and, my word on it, we shall prove good soldiers."

The other smiles at his enthusiasm.

"My first order is that every one of you dress immediately for the opera.

Various exclamations arise—he pays not the slightest heed to them.

"In twenty minutes I will have a carriage at the door," and with this he bows to Mrs. Bob and leaves the room.

"Twenty minutes, and one nearly gone already. It will hardly be possible for me to dress. I beg of you to depart immediately, gentlemen," begs Gypsy, making a rush toward a great Saratoga that peeps into view from the next room.

Finally the twenty minutes pass away, and Mrs. Bob discovers what great things can be accomplished in that space of time, when one is driven.

"Mercy, Bob, just think of it! here I am all ready for the opera, and I declare it lacks five minutes of the time yet. What will we do to make it pass. I believe I'll try on that other new pair of gloves," in despair.

"Don't, I beg of you," laughs Bob, who looks very fine in his dress suit, with a diamond sparkling in his expansive shirt front; "even if we are a little early, let's go below."

"If you think best, dear," with a gentle sigh.

He gazes upon her admiringly; she does look wondrously fair in her shimmering robes, with diamonds gleaming in her ears and at her throat; as lovely a picture as ever thrilled the enraptured eyes of a young husband.

When he makes as though he would take her in his arms she laughingly eludes him.

"Not now, my dear boy—you may kiss me, but have respect for my dress. We are to be on review," and Bob, governed by the circumstances, is compelled to take toll as she suggests, after which he leads this lovely creature below, as proud a man as ever trod the grand staircase of the Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SO HAS THAT SCHEMER MONSIEUR MERLE.

Even if they are a few minutes before time, others are just as impatient, and they find in the lower part of the hotel, the ladies' passage, where they have agreed to meet the rest, those who are also interested in the game—Joe, the Senator, and Craig himself.

The last-named individual has managed in some peculiar manner to change his appearance. He has a wonderful knack of doing this, a slight-of-hand, as it were, which accomplishes much. No matter how it was done, he now appears to have thrown aside his ministerial look. One would say at a glance that he is a society gentleman, good looking and dressed for evening appearance.

He smiles and waves his hand as Bob and his wife make their appearance. The Senator looks exceedingly pleased at the lovely apparition, and as he bends to press a kiss upon Gypsy's forehead, he murmurs, a little brokenly:

"Ah! if you knew how much you look like my Ruth, your own mother, when I first met her at a ball in Richmond. It fairly staggers me," which praise brings a blush to her cheek. It is sweet to have a father's admiration.

There are five—one too many for the hack.

"We can crowd in," says Bob, cheerily.

"Oh! no, I have arranged that," replies Craig, coolly.

"In what way?"

"You see, I have selected a vehicle that has room for another beside the driver. Thanking you for your kindness I shall be the outside passenger."

They arrive.

Scores of carriages line both sides of the street, and still they come. Here are vehicles bearing the signet mark of New York's first families; with some a coat of arms, with others the plain or fancy monogram. Doors are slamming, horses prancing, vehicles moving. It is a scene that presents much life, and which it is strange no artist has drawn upon for a masterpiece.

In turn, our friends reach the stone, and are assisted to alight. Bob makes mental note of the driver's number, and then, with his wife, follows the others into the opera house.

Thus they reach the scene where the last act of the drama is to be played. It seems almost like the irony of fate that this should be under a roof consecrated to mimic tragedy and comedy, which nightly witnesses imaginary scenes such as life all around teems with, scenes that clever playwrights and com-

posers of opera have woven into the woof of their fabric to give it the natural tone which the taste of the day demands.

Craig knows what he is about.

He secures seats, and good ones, too—indeed, it looks as though he must be in league with the ticket seller, or else bought the seats hours before, for there is apparently hardly another vacant one in the house when they enter, and scores of persons who look perfectly able to purchase seats, if any are to be had, are standing up.

No sooner is Gypsy seated than she looks around, woman-like. The scene upon the stage does not draw her attention, and under the peculiar circumstances of the case, this is not much to be wondered at.

All are strangers around her; she looks from face to face; hundreds thus pass in review, but not one that she knows. Ah! a mistake.

"There is Uncle Cornelius—yes, and at his side that miserable little French lawyer who has done his best to win the game from me," she whispers in Bob's ear.

Nearly every one's gaze is focused upon the stage at just this moment, for a queen of song had made her *debut* for the evening, and these lovers of melody, as it comes from a woman's throat, the sweetest melody in all the wide world, are spellbound by her magic voice, so that few even notice the late little company that, with rather less than the usual flutter, settle into their seats.

"I noticed them," says Bob, "but fail to see anything of the others."

At this moment Craig, who is just behind them, leans forward so that his head is close to theirs, and they hear him whisper:

"Have you found them?"

"Only the colonel and that Frenchman," replies Gypsy, behind her fan.

"They have been here longer than ourselves, and they have not noticed our coming."

"I believe that is true, as they have not once looked this way." It is Bob who speaks this time, careful to modulate his voice so he may not annoy those who are close by.

"Follow their eyes, and you may discover what you seek."

Bob comprehends—the advice is good, and worthy of the shrewd man who gives it, as Monsieur Merle, the little lawyer who loves his fancy scarfs and dashing velvet vests, is, of course, deeply interested in watching the parties they seek.

At a glance Bob is able to discover that the two men have their attention pretty well taken up in a certain quarter, vouchsafing only an occasional look into the direction of the stage.

This gives him his cue, but another, with sharper eyes than his own, urged on by the eagerness of a child in search of its mother, is ahead of him.

"I see them," her lips utter, "in the box."

Bob is already gazing in that direction, and now sees for himself. Yes, there is an old gentleman—he sits a little back as though shunning the gaze of the thousands present. So far as Bob is able to see, he may be Squire Gordon, the strange, vindictive old

man whose iron will has caused much suffering in the world; who has been apparently dead, was buried, and comes again upon the scene of life to confound his enemies and bring about new complications.

One glance only Bob gives him; then he turns his eyes upon the other occupant of the box. She sits there in elegant evening attire, diamonds flash in the many lights. She looks beautiful, yet Bob, even with the naked eye, can see a sad expression upon her face.

Gypsy has the glasses, and she is devouring the lady with the gray hair in the box—the lady whom she has reason to suppose will prove to be her own mother.

Bob hears a deep sigh beside him.

"Take the glasses," she whispers.

He looks at her and sees she is deathly pale.

"You are ill!"

"No, no, please don't notice me. I am overcome with emotion, that is all, and will soon be myself," is the quick reply she makes.

He takes the glasses and gets a focus, being deeply interested himself in the lady who is in the company of Squite Gordon.

When his glance falls upon her through the medium of the magic glasses, Bob no longer wonders why his wife uttered that sigh as she handed the gold-mounted opera glasses over to him, or why she looks so pale.

The lady with the gray hair, whose beauty has survived these years and afflictions, is a Gordon all

over, and Bob can instantly see how much his wife resembles her.

This makes their belief the stronger—she must be the squire's daughter, and as he only had one child besides Cornelius living at the time of the trouble what other construction can be placed on it?

Bob feels a hand fall upon his other arm, a hand that seems to quiver with emotion. The Senator sits next to him, so it must be his clutch.

"My dear boy, I have had a shock; I look upon my wife whom for more than fifteen years I have believed to be dead."

Bob pays not the slightest attention to what is happening on the stage; such mimic affairs pale into insignificance beside the drama in real life that is taking place beside him.

By this time the curtain falls, and over the great house a rustling sound succeeds the long silence; people converse, fans wave, and quite a number leave their seats to visit round.

Bob's wife leans forward, and fastens her eyes on the Senator.

"Father, tell me is it true?" she asks.

He looks into her sweet eyes, and with a solemnity in his voice, replies:

"My child, you behold your mother!"

CHAPTER XXX.

WHICH WILL WIN?

Gypsy utters no sound, but her hand mechanically reaches again for the glasses. It is a momentous period of her life, when for the first time since she was a child she gazes upon the face of her mother.

Bob, watching the lady in the box, sees her sweep her glance around the house, as though looking for a familiar face. What will happen when she sees Gypsy? Will that mother-heart be pierced by some intuitive feeling? Will she show deep emotion?

The seconds pass. Bob will soon know. Now the lady focuses her glass upon them. Bob's eyes are keen, and he is sure she starts visibly. At any rate, she holds it upon them long and earnestly. Does Gypsy feel the power of that gaze? She smiles as Bob believes no other human being can smile; it is next to angelic.

The lady in the box lowers her glass. She is almost overcome by some emotion. They see her turn toward her elderly companion as though to call his attention to the face that has caused her such deep emotion. Will Squire Gordon recognize his granddaughter? Unless age and his recent trials have dimmed his sight and faculties, he is very apt to do so. Bob is alarmed.

"Look the other way, my dear; let him see only the side view of your face," he whispers, and Gypsy obeys without asking why.

"She changes her mind and will not tell him. See, already he glances in another quarter," says the quiet voice behind them.

"Why is this so?"

"In that flash of time a suspicion came into existence—a sudden inspiration. She has no longer the utmost faith in her father. She even begins to wonder whether he has not deceived her.

"So she has believed all along and been contented to live, first abroad and then here in New York, as you have seen. Never has she seen her childhood home since the night she left it to be married."

"What now, Craig?"

"The next time she looks the Senator must have his face turned toward her. If he has not changed beyond all recognition we may see how arrow number two wings its flight."

So Senator John, trembling with eagerness, yet showing a wonderful self-control, manages to let the light fall full upon his face as he looks in the direction of the box.

Once more the lady uses her glasses. It is as though some subtle attraction draws her eyes in their direction.

"Lower your head, dear, so she may not see you and turn her attention to the rest. There, it is done."

As Bob speaks he sees the lady fall back in her chair as if about to swoon. The old gentleman bends over her, chafing her hands, and with a supreme effort, she rallies.

It is evident that only a severe shock would thus act upon her; the lapse of time has not made such a

change in John, but that eyes which have once loved him can recognize features so well known years gone by.

"Enough," says the man behind, grimly, "the second blow has fallen. Now for a rise in the thermometer—it will get warmer."

He chuckles while saying it, as though this sort of business is very pleasant to him, and Bob, inwardly chafing over the delay, gives no outward indication of the fact.

Again he hears:

"You have forgotten something, Bob."

"Eh?"

"These two men—they are here with a deep motive in view. Colonel Cornelius has become desperate. He believes his father carries those papers on his person, and he has staked everything on this last deal. To-night they must fall into his hands or he sails on the steamer Majestic on the morrow."

"Then make up your mind he will be across the big pond a week from to-night," says Bob, in such a determined voice that the other laughs.

"Good for you, my dear boy—admire such ginger and snap always. As I said before, he has arranged everything, and expects it to work with clock-like regularity, not taking into account the fact that such fellows as ourselves are in the game and wide awake.

"Notice them, and you will quickly discover that they are evidently in communication with some other party. It bothered me at first to discover who this was, but I found it out at last. She——"

"Ah! it's a woman, then?"

"Yes; cast your left optic up yonder under the first gallery—dress circle or whatever you call it. Look beside that pillar—it half screens her. Now she bends forward—what do you see?"

"Josephine."

"I thought so. Well, she's in it for keeps. She hates your wife, and intends doing everything in her power to bring ruin upon her. Hence this compact with the plotters. You will receive a surprise before the bells of New York toll the midnight hour—surprise at the boldness with which these allies play their game—perhaps a small amount of the same for the manner in which I bring them to book, for the snare is set, the trap baited, and when the time comes to pull the string some one is going to be caught."

All of which is interesting to Bob, because one who holds his heart is so deeply involved in the outcome of the game.

"They grow restless as the time draws nearer—their signals are exchanged more rapidly. I believe the woman has been watching us—trust her sharp eyes for discovering our presence—and is endeavoring to transmit her knowledge to the men, who have been so busily engaged watching that box as to find no time for a sweeping survey of the house, and hence have failed to see us."

"You are right—they look this way and show some signs of excitement."

"I see you have discovered my way of watching them without causing alarm—that large mirror on the wall does the business. They have failed to count on our presence, but don't imagine for a moment

that such a fact will change them one iota in their intentions. As I said before, everything depends on their success now, and they have risked all on this die."

The curtain rolls up and again eager eyes are fastened upon the great stage. Music fills the house, and appeals to the senses of those who love sweet harmony.

Watching the box Bob sees that the lady has changed her position, and is now half concealed from their gaze, though she steals a look in their direction once in a while.

Perhaps she would leave, only that the old man is thoroughly infatuated with the music, his one weak point, and sits there wrapped in it, his eyes glued on the stage, caring nothing for the audience while his soul responds to the divine harmony.

And Bob's wife—what torture those minutes are to her! waiting for the time to come when the truth will be made known—when the handwriting on the wall must declare whether she is to have a mother or not.

Craig is not idle, though he leaves Bob alone to look after his wife—Bob, who has for almost the first time in his life experienced a feeling akin to fear, for he sympathizes with Gypsy to such an extent that he enters into her emotions.

Bending forward Craig whispers in the ear of the Senator:

"John Archer, have you complete control of your faculties—do you believe you could withstand some-

thing of a shock without betraying the fact to those around?" is what he asks.

"Generally, I am cool and collected," replies the other, quite in the dark as to what is about to be sprung on him.

"Are you at this present moment?"

The Senator draws in a long breath, and seems to shake himself together.

"I am ready."

His manner is that of the circus athlete settling himself firmly upon the ground preparatory to allowing half a dozen men to form a pyramid, of which he shall be the base.

Craig goes on.

"You have been so engrossed with what is in yonder box, my dear sir, that I imagine you have paid little or no attention to your neighbors. Am I right?"

"Haven't looked around since the start."

"Then suppose you do so, and see the little surprise I have prepared, assisted by one of the queerest freaks of fortune. There is present one who was once your best friend, but whom circumstances caused you to hate as a serpent who stung you, a wolf that crept into your family to destroy its happiness. He is here to meet you—here to prove, at your leisure, how grossly you wronged him, here to do his part in unraveling the deep mystery surrounding the past. I have warned you—keep cool and turn to your left."

Senator John does so.

In spite of his self-control he shivers as his eyes

meet a pair that thrill him. The gentleman seated there, a grave looking man, smiles.

Again the curtain descends, after a very brief act. When it rises once more it will be upon the last act of the mimic play.

This is fortunate, as it gives those who are so deeply interested a chance to talk.

"John," says the serious gentleman on his left, "you wronged me years ago. I have waited for the time to come when I could defend myself. It is here, and I am prepared with proofs to establish my entire innocence—to show you that I did not even see your wife at the time in question. Do you feel as bitter as ever, John?"

"Time has healed my wounds to some extent, Henry, and even if I believed you guilty I would forgive. But, I rejoice to hear you declare your innocence—doubly rejoice, because it clears the shadow from *her* name."

John is sincere; he proves it by holding out his hand and clasping that of the old friend, whom he once believed had ruined his home.

"You never discovered the truth, then?" asks the other.

"Never."

"I learned later on that the man with whom Ruth went aboard the steamer was her own brother."

"What! Colonel Cornelius had a hand in the affair, too? I might have suspected it, since he was his father's willing tool at the time, and wished for nothing better than a chance to injure his sister and those she loved. I rejoice in this because it clears Ruth's

name. Falling into the pit he dug I have grievously wronged her. I shall not spare myself one iota; I shall not forget to lay it at his door. First came the picnic, her supposed death, and then my belief in her flight to Europe."

"Do you know where to find her, John? is she alive? I have not seen or heard of her since the night we had supper together in your house?"

"Ah! Henry, look toward the box over yonder—that is Squire Gordon you see."

"That old gentleman? I would not have known him, and yet I suppose at closer range he would show the Gordon features. I see some one else."

"Take these glasses."

"It is a lady—her face—zounds, John, I find myself gazing on your wife."

"Yes, and this lady next to me is the child you remember—little Estelle."

"Can it be possible—and the gentleman, John?"

"Her husband, Robert Pemberton, of this city—a bright, clever fellow who worships his wife."

"If that were a charm against evil you had not supped with adversity, but, alas! there are other forces that play in this world, forces of darkness, human passions.

"Yes, yes. Henry, the only mistake I made, the great blunder of my life, was a lack of perfect confidence and trust in Ruth. Had I followed her I must have learned the truth and defeated their plans As it was I buried myself in obscurity, feeling that my life was a curse. Then came the news of their death, and I tried to forget, to forgive."

"I knew Craig—he came to me and told me a little, asking my presence here. You see I have come to witness your final triumph over the forces that conspired against you."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks."

The curtain rises, the interval has been brief, and the last act of the comedy in opera begins; so, too, the time for the closing scene in the other drama draws near.

Craig leans forward—his mouth is close to the ear of Bob Pemberton as he says:

"Ah! Monsieur Merle and the doughty colonel have slipped out. The time has arrived for the real tragedy to open. Come, give the signal; now is our chance during this break; we leave our seats—we are gone."

CHAPTER XXXI.

NOW MONSIEUR SMILES—BUT—

Bob speaks to his wife, and they all rise. Fortunately no one blocks their way to the aisle, which is to be laid at the door of good luck or else the generalship of Craig.

Bob gives one backward glance in the direction of the box. What he sees is a lady standing erect and nervously donning her wraps, while an old gentleman expostulates in vain against this unseemly departure. This time it is the daughter's will that has

full sway; she has awakened from a long lethargy; the mother instinct in her heart recognizes the fact that it is essential to her future happiness that she should overtake the party leaving the body of the house, and learn who it is accompanies the gentleman she has recognized, in spite of the changes years have wrought, as her husband, so fondly, madly loved in days gone by, so sadly mourned as one in the grave.

The meeting will occur in the lobby; perhaps it may not come about exactly as any one of the characters involved plans, for when many minds evolve a scheme, it is apt to be something on the order of what we call to-day a conglomeration.

Lying in wait there are the human vampires known as Monsieur Merle and Colonel Cornelius Gordon. They have not failed to observe the movement in the box, as they have a good opportunity for observation, although, of course, they fail to notice the cause for the sudden exodus. It suits them to have the closing scene of their drama occur before the throng pushes through the doors, eager to gain the outside air, like the torrent that flows through a broken dam.

Craig checks his party near the doors, to give the squire and his vailed companion, hurrying along the side aisle, a chance to reach the entrance first.

This they do, not noticing our friends in the crowd. The lady almost drags her aged companion along—the spirit of the Gordons has perhaps lain dormant for years, but something has occurred to-night to arouse it.

In the vestibule she looks around eagerly, breathlessly.

They are not in sight. A number of men meet her gaze, but she pays no heed to them, since her eyes fail to discover the particular forms she seeks.

"Oh! where are they—why does fate tantalize me so cruelly. I am sure there is more than fancy in it —more than the imagination of a distracted brain. Father, don't you see them anywhere?"

"Who, child?" the old man asks, half awed by this singular state on her part.

"Those two so like my husband—my child."

"The woman is mad," he mutters, for, poor old fool, his eyes have never once been turned for more than five seconds at a time upon the audience, and he does not dream of what the auditorium contained for himself and his child.

She turns from him with a cry of pain; can no one answer her eager question; several men are advancing, and to them she appeals.

"Did you see a party leave here a few minutes ago; several gentlemen and a lady, a beautiful little woman? I have missed them and desire to overtake them very much. Which way did they go?" she pants, laying a hand on the gentleman's arm, so great is her excitement.

To her astonishment, he clasps that in his, clasps it as though he had a right. She gives a cry, a gurgling cry of indignation, of alarm.

"Unhand me, sir! How dare you?" she says, struggling to release herself.

"Wretch, what does this mean?" snaps the old

squire, as he advances threateningly, with his heavy cane upraised.

The man laughs. What a sneer there is in the sound as it falls from his lips.

"Ruth, don't you know me?"

She looks into his face at these words, looks and seems to shiver, as though a cold Siberian blast had swept across her heart, but lately all aglow with the enthusiasm of aroused hopes that have lain dormant for years.

"Cornelius, is it you?" falls from her lips.

"What!" feebly utters the old man, falling back aghast from that face, with its sardonic smile, allowing his threatening cane to fall without even attempting to use it upon the other, for this evil son has been the thorn in his flesh for years, and his presence here and now gives Squire Gordon sudden cause for alarm.

"Yes, the same old chestnut—a bad penny is sure to turn up. If I had been good I'd have kicked the bucket long ago. But I am not here to preach a sermon—only to carry out a very disagreeable duty."

"Duty!" echoes his sister, who intuitively knows there is something back of it all.

"Duty!" repeats the old man, looking from his reprobate son to those near him, and somehow the iron will of the past seems to have gone to pieces, for he falls to trembling as with the ague.

"Yes, my solemn, disagreeable duty. It goes against my grain to have to do it, but stern necessity knows no law. He is my father still, and, for one, I don't intend the public shall be treated to a laughing

spectacle—a Gordon must not be allowed to drag the name in the dust. When he is no longer in a condition to take care of himself he must be looked after."

"Sir, what do you mean?" splutters the squire, some of his old-time fire coming back.

"That you have lost your reason, both of you—that you must be detained until an examination is made. I hold the judge's order. Doctor, do your duty," waving his hand to the sleek-looking individual who stands near, and whose appearance, paper in hand, is about on a par with the condemned about to make a neat little speech before stepping off.

"I hold in my hand an order from Judge Bassett authorizing me to secure the person of Squire Rudolph Gordon, or one claiming to be such——"

"And his daughter, Ruth," prompts the colonel.

"Of course, and his daughter Ruth, and hold him, or them, safely in my delightful retreat beyond the Harlem—a place whose satisfied inmates never yet made a complaint until the court can inquire into their mental condition, and satisfy itself regarding their sacred right to liberty."

The old man looks at the speaker with the same black brow he was wont, in years gone by, to terrify his slaves, and all who came in contact with him.

"Do I understand you rightly; you dare to call me a lunatic, and threaten to put me in a mad-house; me, Squire Rudolph Gordon, of Virginia? Such brazen impudence! It is a piece of devilish work worthy of my talented son. But you will find it one thing to say and another to execute. This is the nineteenth century, and we are in modern New York.

Carry me off to a mad-house! Bah! I laugh at you, I defy you, rascals, plotters, thieves!"

"Bravo!" says Bob, in a low tone, for, unseen by the actors in this little domestic affair, they have come into the vestibule and shut the sound of music beyond the door.

"That grandsire of yours is at least a worthy specimen of Virginia chivalry, and knows not fear. I admire him for that, at least. See him stand there waving his heavy cane around his head, reckless as to whether it strikes friend or foe. Do you know he makes me think of Gladstone! He has much the same face, and that indomitable will that has carried him over crises where weaker men would have yielded up the ghost."

While Bob is talking Squire Gordon holds his enemies at bay with his cane. They do not seem to relish a personal contact with such a cleverly wielded cudgel. Some wait for him to tire out, others move to the rear, while the worthy doctor attracts his attention—an old game which he has probably practiced on many an occasion.

"But, my dear sir, we do not deserve such epithets as those. We are law-abiding citizens, and I am acting under orders from a well-known judge. No police officer would dare interfere with me. On the contrary, if such guardians of the peace were to appear here at this moment, and I showed him the document I carry, it would be his bounden duty to assist me to the utmost. Hence, under these circumstances, you will see the folly of resistance and accompany us peacefully."

"I'll see you in a warmer country than this first," roars the undaunted old Virginian, though his cane no longer waves with the velocity it did at first. At seventy-five one's muscles will wane in power, even though the enthusiasm may still remain.

"My quarters are very comfortable."

"Gammon, sir."

"We have an easy riding coach," advancing a step.

"Keep back!" and the cane cuts the air within an inch of his head, causing him to dodge.

"But, my dear sir, you must not defy the law. Now, boys, take the old fool," and as the others suddenly close in, Squire Gordon is a prisoner.

Panting, he surveys them, undaunted still, and were he twenty years younger they would have repented their rashness in assailing him. Ruth wrings her hands in anguish, and appeals to those who witness the scene, for help; but they have seen the document the doctor holds, and dare not interfere. She cries in deep distress:

"Will no one put out a hand to save him?"

"Now's your chance," whispers Craig, chuckling.

"Madame, your appeal is not in vain. Count on me. Who am I? Your daughter's husband." She utters a low shriek and clasps Gypsy in her arms. "Respected mother-in-law, I salute you—command me."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"HE LAUGHS LOUDEST WHO LAUGHS LAST!"

At this sudden interruption Monsieur Merle and his employer look daggers, but they are like desperate fighters, driven into the last ditch; they will not give up so long as the faintest hope remains. They have secured the squire.

"Away with him, doctor!" cries the colonel, with a dramatic wave of his hand.

The physician turns to his men.

"To the carriage with him."

"No, you don't."

This last comes from Bob, who springs forward to bar the passage of the men with their prisoner. It does not matter to him that his single arm is opposed to half a dozen, not counting the leaders. His heart urges him to the deed, his love for Gypsy, and his American liking for fair play.

Still clasped in her mother's arms, Mrs. Bob sees the action of her husband, and appreciates the pluck he shows. She even claps her little hands vigorously and cries:

"Good, Bob; don't let them take him away to a mad-house. I'm proud of you, Bob, indeed I am."

The spectators say nothing, but look on, intensely pleased. It is as if the drama were transferred from the opera house to the vestibule, and it costs them nothing.

Some of them feel like cheering the words of Bob's wife; it is as if two dogs were engaged in a fight, and the owner of the smaller one urged him on against superior powers.

But Pemberton, although ready and willing to shoulder the burden alone, and able to prove a host in himself, is not to stand there long, a single hand against many.

Senator John rushes to his side. Think of it, John Archer, whose life has been ruined through the evil machinations of this old man now runs to his defense! He might not have been equal to such a thing a few days before, but the blessings that have come to him, the restoration of wife and daughter soften his heart, so that hatred and malice can find no lodging there.

He ranges himself alongside Bob, and his stout figure gives promise of proving a rock upon which some unfortunate will split.

"I'm with you, my dear boy. They'll find it a difficult thing to drag him away without coming in contact with trouble. All hands on deck to repel boarders!" sings out the veteran pilgrim, as he plants himself in line.

"Count on me!" exclaims another, ranging up alongside the others. Of course it is Joe Hooker, and he extends the line, so that in order to rush through, the captors of the squire will have to crush the snags in front of them.

This leaves only Craig, and as yet he does not advance a step. It is not fear that holds him in check, for the man does not know it. He has another mo-

tive, and desires to see the play reach its legitimate dramatic conclusion.

Although not expecting resistance, the doctor has brought force enough with him to meet any ordinary trouble. They are some seven to three, which ought to be enough.

"Gentlemen, I regret this difficulty as much as you do, but necessity compels me to perform a disagreeable duty. I am backed by the law, and have force enough to accomplish my ends. For the last time, I ask you to step aside, and allow my men to peaceably perform their duty."

"We refuse to move—do your worst!"

The doctor raises his hand, and is just about to give the order for an advance; a conflict seems imminent, which may prove to be a disgraceful street brawl, when something occurs which Craig has foreseen for the last minute, and which accounts for his not taking part in the game.

"What's all this mean?" says a gruff voice, and a bluecoat bustles up, followed by his partner.

"These fellows are attempting to drag an old gentleman to a mad-house. We ask your assistance, officer," says Bob.

"On our side, we demand your aid to clear the way for us to do our duty. Officer, read this document and then refuse at your peril," and the doctor thrusts a paper into the hand of the foremost policeman.

He looks at it.

"Well, what do you make of it, officer?" demands the doctor, with something of exultation in his voice, for he believes he has the tide in his favor.

"No mistake about it; this here is a court order from Judge Bassett, authorizing Doctor Bailey to secure the person of Squire Gordon, of Gordonville, Virginia, and to hold him until the court can inquire into his sanity."

"Very good. Gentlemen, you hear?"

Bob and his comrades look depressed, but they do not yet give way; as a last resort they may appeal to the officers to take the whole party to the station, where the squire may be searched and his valuable papers locked up.

"Only one question remains," says the officer who has so ably taken charge of the matter.

"What is that?" demands the physician.

"The identity of the party. Is this Squire Gordon?"

"No one will attempt to deny that."

"Then I reckon we're bound to help you in discharging the order of the court."

"You hear, gentlemen?" triumphantly.

"Clear the way in front," flourishing his long night stick menacingly. "I suppose you have a carriage, doctor?"

"Yes; right in front of the entrance, officer."

"Then take your prisoner to it. We'll keep back any outsiders, I reckon. Bill, fall in on the left."

Things look dubious for Bob and his party, and they are almost ready to despair. At this moment there is an acquisition to their ranks. Craig has seen fit to step forward.

"Officer Hummel, I commend you for your strict obedience to orders. Look at that paper again; what was the hour of its being issued?"

"Eleven o'clock, sir."

"Well, cast your eye over this document, and note its contents, handing him a paper, and flashing a sneering glance at the conspirators, who immediately show signs of confusion, and look at each other with alarm written on their faces.

"It revokes the order given for the arrest of one Squire Gordon, and makes it null," says the intelligent officer.

"And the hour?"

"Two P. M. of this day."

Monsieur Merle shrugs his shoulders in a way that plainly signifies he is done with the game; he means to wash his hands of it. As for Colonel Cornelius, he utters a groan; it is so exasperating to come so near and yet fail.

"With this later order of the court in your hands, officer, what is your duty?" asks Craig.

"To release the prisoner," promptly.

Craig turns to the doctor, and lifting the lapel of his coat, shows his badge of authority.

"Order your dogs of war off, doctor, or, by the powers! I'll land every mother's son of you in the Tombs."

The doctor, having seen a great light, wilts.

"It is done, sir. Mistakes will happen, you know, even in the best regulated families, and I realize that I have made one here. Accept my apologies. Men, we will take our departure."

He bows politely to Ruth and her daughter, still clasped in one another's arms, and leaves the great vestibule of the music hall.

No one attempts to detain them, for, somehow, his presence seems to cast a chill upon our friends; perhaps it is because it is associated with the dark secrets of a mad-house.

Bob whirls upon the colonel, who has been so completely upset by this sudden turn of affairs that he does not even think of flight. He shrinks visibly before the glance Pemberton gives him.

"Well, what do you think we would be justified in doing with you, sir?" Bob thunders.

Monsieur Merle is on hand, and no one ever knew him to be abashed. He has seen a chance for a great fee slip from between his fingers, but he has devoted himself to the services of the Virginian, he does not desert him now.

"Allow me to say a word, my dear young gentleman, and tell you what you will do if you are as wise as I take you to be. You will give your wife's uncle a thousand dollars, and send him from the country to-morrow, with the distinct understanding that if he ever shows himself on this side of the Atlantic again you will proceed against him."

The assurance of this demand rather takes Bob's breath away.

"That is refreshing, to say the least, and yet, by Jove! we might do worse. What do you say, father-in-law—Gypsy? It will save us the publicity of a trial."

"I am satisfied, but if he gives more trouble I will take him in hand myself. You remember I can use a sword, Colonel Cornelius," says Senator John, earnestly.

Of course, Ruth and her daughter acquiesce, and the colonel heaves a sigh of relief, for it has been a close shave, and at one time he even imagined he could hear the clang of a jail door near by.

"Call at the hotel and see me in the morning, both of you, and we will fix this matter. I don't believe in compromising a felony, but to spare these ladies publicity I refrain from giving you the whipping you deserve. Get out of our sight, both."

So the spectators are cheated out of another scene at the close of the little drama, and our friends, entering their carriages, drive to the Fifth Avenue.

Here, in Bob's private parlor, explanations are given, Squire Gordon breaks down, and sobs like a child, confessing his wrong-doing; his iron will gives way, and from that hour when he sees his daughter and her husband united, with their child also clasped in their arms, he never emerges from the cloud, but grows more feeble and childish every day, until, finally, he is laid at rest in the tomb whose terrible barriers he once burst.

Every doubt, every cause for sorrow is swept away when just before the holidays Bob and his wife, together with Senator John and Ruth bid Joe and Craig farewell, and steam from New York Harbor, bound for the sunny skies of Italy. It is peace at last.

(THE END.)

READING RAILROAD SYSTEM.

THE ROYAL BLUE LINE

between New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, the South, and South-west is conceded to be the BEST CONSTRUCTED and MOST FINELY EQUIPPED RAILROAD in the country.

THE OLD RELIABLE ROUTE

to all points in Interior Pennsylvania—Reading, Harrisburg, Gettysburg, Pottsville, Shamokin, and Williamsport.

THE ROYAL ROUTE TO THE SEA,

The Double Track Line between Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

705

I. A. SWEIGARD, General Superintendent.

C. G. HANCOCK, General Passenger Agent.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

000228767 15